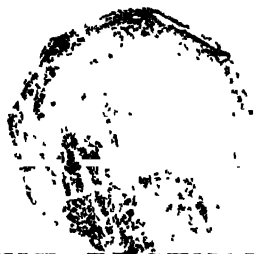


THE
DAYS OF THE REGENCY,
(GEORGE THE FOURTH ;)
OR,
TOWN AND COUNTRY.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE.

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THE DAYS OF THE REGENCY.

CHAPTER I.

STEAM ! steam ! steam ! Steam has so changed the face of the country, from John o'Groat's house to the Land's End, that few persons of the present day who are still basking on the sunny side of fifty, either have, or can have, any accurate idea of what England was during the early part of the present century—and nevertheless we have only just reached the middle of it !

The chronicling pens of former days speak of visible changes in the aspect of society produced by succeeding ages ; nay, if they wrote of very stirring times, they might have ventured to say that considerable alterations in the condition and character of a people made themselves visible between the beginning of a century and the end of it. But the Froissarts of our times have need of daily papers rather than of learned archives, by way of authority, on which to found their statements and remarks.

Opinions may differ as to the comparative value of what has been lost and what has been gained by this great change, but it can scarcely be doubted that accuracy of detail is to be counted among the losses, though if tediousness has gone with it, the sprightly new world around us will probably account the loss a gain. Be this as it may, an illustration of the change of which I speak may be fairly enough taken from the newly-found power that has thus suddenly metamorphosed the condition of the world—

“ For steam is still the lord of all,”

and we may truly say, that our written details, both of events and of character, bear about the same resemblance to those left to us by our fathers, as the glances of landscape afforded to the passengers of an express railroad train do to the meditative,

lingering contemplation of the traveller, who, in days long since gone and forgotten, made one in

“ A Derby dilly carrying three insides.”

That we, in some degree, lengthen our lives by thus shortening our distances is quite certain, and this, where life is usually employed, is great gain ; and it is great gain, also, if we can so manage as to acquire many ideas in the same space of time which it formerly took us to acquire few ; but who ever saw a medal that was equally admirable on both sides ? It is impossible to move onward so rapidly as we are doing now without overlooking many interesting objects by the road-side. And then this steam, which brings all the world together so easily, knocks off as many corners of character as a road, and thereby makes one people so very like another people, and one set so very like another set, that our old comedians, could we have them back again, would be terribly at a loss for a type whereby to sketch a striking character which should at once be true to nature, yet sufficiently marked among his fellow men to be recognised as a good specimen of a class.

The classing of men now-a-days is an operation which, if carefully performed to-day, has a great chance of being so obsolete to-morrow as to render the page that records it of no more value than a botanical classification of a hundred years old. Where are our Whigs, and where are our Tories ? Where are our orthodox, and where are our heterodox ? Where are our scholars, and where are our ignorant ? To the last query, indeed, the answer is easy enough, and must remain the same, unless an universal earthquake does the work of an universal deluge. NOWHERE must, of course, be now uttered in chorus, as a reply to it, by the whole world. But, excepting the immeasurable class comprising all persons possessed of universal information, there is none other which now endures long enough to furnish a type worth studying ; for almost before 'tis seen 'tis gone.

And how can it be otherwise ? There may still, perhaps, be little boys born with Squire-Weston hearts, and Parson-Adams spirits within them. But this will not suffice to produce Squire Westons, or Parson Adamsons ; for where is the wide space that separated the originals of these fine sketches from the jostling throngs, both noble and simple, of our great cities ? It has vanished, and with it the possibility of finding any more such genuine individuality as delighted us in them. Yet, nevertheless, it seems to me that those who have lived long enough to remember what the manners of the middle classes were in the more remote counties, before the invention of steam-boats and railroads, had caused them to be jumbled all together, till every

trace of rural freshness was rubbed off, might fix upon less interesting periods for the employment of a gossiping pen.

The heroines of the following tale were of this class, and nothing shall be recorded of them, or of the set amidst which they were born and bred, which has not the authority of nature, as witnessed in scenes long past, but well remembered.

CHAPTER II.

My sister-heroines were the daughters of a clergyman who, fifty-five years ago, became the incumbent of a snug little College living in the county of Cornwall. His name was Hartwell. I have called his living snug—first, because it had a very comfortable house upon it, with glebe enough to furnish a small dairy, and a small hay-loft; and, secondly, because he received an income of three hundred a-year from it, without ever hearing of any disputes about tithes.

Another reason for its deserving the name of snug was, that there was no dissenting chapel in the parish; nor had anything in the shape of an itinerant preacher ever been heard of, I believe, at Penmouais.

I shall begin my story at the time when the eldest daughter, Mary, had just completed her twentieth year, her sister Harriet being fifteen months younger. No other child had ever been born to the worthy vicar; and, as he had waited a good many years for his living, small as it was, neither he nor his wife were very young when they married, so that the difference in age between him and his children was at least forty years. His wife was exactly ten years his junior; but, nevertheless, there was no appearance of objectionable disparity of age between them, which may be accounted for by Mr. Hartwell's being a particularly good-tempered man. This temper, however, had not been as much tried as it might have been had the three hundred a-year produced by his living constituted his whole income; for not even in Cornwall, and fifty and odd years ago, could three hundred a-year have been sufficient to ward off the miseries of poverty from a man who was born and bred a gentleman, had chosen a wife from the same class, and was not only the father of two dearly-loved children, but of his whole parish into the bargain.

A tiny little freehold of a dairy-farm in the neighbouring county of Devonshire, inherited from his father, brought him two hundred a-year, and the tiny little fortune of his wife, which was placed in the funds, another hundred; so that in

those days Mr. Hartwell might fairly take his place amid the educated middle classes of society, without passing on the other side of the way to avoid a poor parishioner, or living in terror lest the Christmas bills should find the little money-drawer in his old bureau (for in those days a country clergyman was his own banker) in too exhausted a condition to answer them.

In truth, Mr. Hartwell enjoyed a greater degree of freedom from pecuniary anxiety than it is easy to find now in any situation whatever, or with any income; but this is an assertion that will scarcely receive credit from any who are not old enough to remember the absence of pretension which might generally be found in a country clergyman's household fifty years ago.

A house, a garden, and thirty acres of grass land, rent free, with a clear income of six hundred a-year, in days when a well-educated young woman was not stared at as a phenomenon if she had not been in Paris, nor pitied as a victim of parental tyranny if she had not often been in London—such a provision for a family went far, and that, too, without any very vehement economical exertions, either.

"Oh! to be sure, everything was so excessively cheap in those days!" says a fair reader, who is so hard up upon her indulgent husband's pitiful five thousand a-year, as really to be harassed almost out of her life by the difficulties arising from spending every year rather more than she has got.

But the fair lady is mistaken. People did not, indeed, pay quite so much for an opera-box then as they do now, because there were not so many who deemed it essential to have one; but various kinds of more necessary commodities are considerably cheaper now than they were then. Yet, even if it were otherwise,—even if everything we use, or consume, were really dearer now than it was fifty years ago—this would by no means suffice to account for the immense difference in the condition of Mr. Hartwell, in the year 1790, and that of some thousands of persons possessing the same means in the year 1857.

Perhaps, the easiest method of conveying a just idea of the interior of Penmorris Vicarage and all its belongings, will be by copying some portions of the MSS., which are still affectionately preserved by some of the younger branches of the family, and which have been entrusted, without any restriction whatever, to me, to be used or not used, according to my fancy; these confiding friends and myself being equally certain that no indiscretion on my part, short of printing the real names of Mr. Hartwell's family and friends, together with that of their residence, could bring upon them any single eye, the glance of which they should desire to avoid.

Having said thus much by way of preface, I will only add

that I knew them all well, and loved them tenderly, and then proceed to give some extracts from the sort of journalizing letters which Mrs. Hartwell was in the habit of addressing to the earliest friend of her youth, from whom her marriage had separated her.

“Hartwell Vicarage, 15th May, 1792.

“Do you remember the words, my dear Margaret, with which you greeted my intelligence, that, after seven tedious years of waiting, I was going very speedily to be married to Mr. Hartwell? If you do not, I do.

“You looked in my face with a sad sort of foreboding eye, and said, with a gentle sigh, ‘May God bless you, my dearest Mary!—I trust that the lot you have chosen may prove a contented one; but it is difficult to forget that you might have done so much better!’

“I might have done better! Margaret, Margaret, you spoke as one who knew what she was talking about, and yet no lips, since talking began, ever uttered words more totally void of truth and reason. Could I have done better for myself. If I did not happen to know that this ‘better,’ according to you, would have consisted in my becoming the partner for life of the worshipful Squire Craddock, of Knowles Park, I might have been lost in admiration at the powerful stretch of that imagination which could figure forth a situation better than that of being the wife of Henry Hartwell. Could you but see him, Margaret—not as I see him, but as every eye that looks upon him may see him—could you but see him in his pretty little home, long hoped for but come at last, you would not, I think, tell me again that I might have done better. But I must not scold any more, or I shall have neither time nor space for anything else.

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“Do you know, my dear friend, that I begin to think it is a much better thing to marry, as I have done, at thirty, than, as I very foolishly wished to do, at twenty. I think it very likely that if Penmorris had come to him then, as I so ardently wished and prayed, I should not have made him such a good wife as I do now. I should have been thinking more about bonnets and gowns, and less about our cows and our chickens. It is such a comfortable house, Margaret, so light and cheerful, and the grass-plots and gravel walks so nicely kept. Next year, I shall have flowers by basketsful—for Henry is an excellent gardener, and, if it did not look like boasting, I might say that my love of flowers having been made known to him, will be very sure to set him busily to work on that part of the business. Neither must you suppose, Miss Margaret, that

the vicar of Penmorris is so poor a man as to do all the work of the garden himself. On the contrary, he has no less than two able assistants ; the most constant being a certain very important personage called James, who takes care of my two cows, and my two pigs, and of all my cocks, hens, chickens, and ducks, and helps our portly in-door man-servant to clean out our nice little farm-yard.

"Cannot you fancy you see it all, Margaret? All newly repaired, painted, white-washed, beautified, for the thrice happy helpmate of the new incumbent. I know that I must not ask you to leave your good mother while she continues to be so great an invalid ; but I would give a good deal for the pleasure of having you here for a week or two, that you might deliberately reconsider your opinion as to the probability of my having 'done better,' had I, some six or seven years ago, consented to become the mistress of Knowles Park."

* * * * *

But enough of retrospect. Suffice it to say, that, in the year 1811, Mrs. Hartwell was quite as well contented with her lot as she had been when writing the letter I have just copied, exactly twenty years before. Her own charming face, which at thirty had lost not a single attraction, for it owed its sparkling beauty less to complexion than to outline, and more to expression than to either, was at fifty charming still to all who were happy enough to live under the influence of the intellect and the temper by which it was animated. And as to herself, any pleasure she might have derived in her younger days from the knowledge that she was beautiful, was, to say the very least of it, doubled by the consciousness that she had now two faces belonging to her, quite as beautiful as her own had been, and certainly admired by herself ten thousand times more. And then she wrote thus to the same friend, who still remained unmarried, and who still, from domestic duties, was almost as much a prisoner at home, as ever she had been, though it was now no longer her mother, but the family of a widower brother, who profited by her usefulness.

"My little Harry, as I have been so long used to call her, was taken for my eldest daughter yesterday, by an old college acquaintance of her father, who paid us an unexpected visit ; and therefore I am very steadfastly determined to call her little Harry no longer, if I can possibly help it. You saw this ci-devant little Harry, six years ago, my dear Margaret, and then you prophesied that she would never be so handsome as her elder sister ; but you were mistaken, for she is now, being between eighteen and nineteen years old, not only much handsomer than our pretty little Mary, but, without any vain boast-

fulness, I can honestly assure you that she is the most beautiful girl I ever saw. She is considerably taller than I am, but without looking too tall, for her form is exquisitely graceful. I was never aware till now of the difference between the beauty of a child's eyes, and those of a young woman. Harriet, though you thought her less pretty than Mary, had always fine large, clear, brown eyes, and eye-lashes which rarely failed to be remarked by strangers, on account of their long, dark richness; but since she ceased to be a child, those brown eyes have a sort of soft, gentle light in them which I never remarked before; and this it is, as I suppose, which has given so much additional loveliness to her countenance.

"Mary is still the same sweet, innocent, gay-hearted, brightly intelligent little creature that she has ever been; and I believe no one could deny that she is a very pretty girl. But Harriet is 'the beauty'—a phrase which I am afraid she hears, notwithstanding the retirement in which we live, rather oftener than I would wish she should. All these thoughts have been put into my head by the arrival of Mr. Cuthbert, her father's old college acquaintance. I do not believe that he is a day younger than Henry, though I suspect he would be excessively angry if he heard any one say so, for he has by no means forgotten that he has been very handsome, and it cannot be denied that the great care which it is very evident he bestows on his person, is in some degree successful, for he is certainly well-looking for his age. I do not believe that I should have ever found out he wore a wig, had I not known his age, and that it was quite impossible that those good-looking, wavy, brown locks could be his own. As to his teeth, I can only say that if they are the gift of Nature, he has treated them with all the care their peculiar beauty deserves, for they are in a wonderfully high state of preservation. He is, too, a very fine figure of a man, and as upright, and almost as slight-looking, as if he were five-and-twenty. His hands and feet, moreover, are particularly handsome; and, upon my word, the care he seems to bestow upon his fine nails is, considering that he must be very nearly sixty years old, most superlatively ridiculous. And now, perhaps, you may think me very ill-natured, and very ungrateful too, considering that this old Mr. Cuthbert is a great man, with a very fine estate, and I know not how many houses, and castles, and parks, belonging to him, and that it was vastly condescending in him to remember an obscure country clergyman, who was only an humble pensioner, when he was a fellow-commoner at ——— College.

"But as to being ungrateful for his visit, my conscience does not trouble me very greatly, for I suspect that Henry owes the honour of it to the accident of his having found our lady of the

manor, Mrs. Osterly, absent. She is his first cousin, it seems, and having been paying a visit to some nobleman who lives in Devonshire, he thought it would be a good opportunity to pay his compliments to the old lady, who, being childless, and very rich, and perhaps half a dozen years his senior, was certainly well worth a little attention. But finding that she was at Bath, and recollecting (conveniently enough) that my husband was an old acquaintance, he came here, and having told us of his disappointment, accepted Henry's invitation to awaither return at the Vicarage, with as much promptitude as it was made.

"And as to my ill-nature, it may be accounted for, if not altogether excused, by the fact, that he has talked more nonsense and made more fine speeches to my little Harry during the two days he has passed here than either she or Mary ever listened to in the whole course of their lives before. And what makes me more angry still is, that Harriet declares she admires him exceedingly.

"Mary laughs at him and his pomposity, and his fine speeches, till her merry eyes shed many tears; but my silly Harry has not once joined in the laugh. This antiquated coxcomb is a widower and without children. Heaven forbid that he should fall in love with our poor dear beauty, and so dazzle her childish eyes as to beguile her into marrying him! To speak seriously, however, I do not believe there is much cause for alarm. If I mistake not, our prodigiously-grand new friend would deem the degradation of such an alliance as disgraceful as being sent to Botany Bay: and even if he had doubts about the culpable condescension of marrying a country clergyman's daughter, his high and mighty cousin, Mrs. Osterly, would soon solve them.

"This lady has been a right good and very friendly neighbour to us for above twenty years, but never once during the whole of this time has she ever permitted us to forget for a moment, that though all men are equal before God—and women, too—yet nevertheless that there would be something rather impious in supposing that this state of things was to begin while we remain on the earth; and therefore that, at present, her place is in the manor pew, and mine in the Vicarage ditto. It is true that she always makes a sort of pious little bow to the pulpit, and always treats Mr. Hartwell as if she considered him as a sort of link between her somewhat superhuman self and the rest of the parish. As for me and my daughters, it is impossible not to feel that she always intends to be kind to us, and it would be worse than folly to quarrel with kindness because it appears in the stately stiffness of full dress.

"So we never have quarrelled with it; and surely it is a

satisfactory proof of this, that the friendship between the Manor-House and the Vicarage, such as it is—though I believe it would be more decorous to call it friendly intercourse—has never been interrupted or obscured for a moment. But I cannot help suspecting that, if Mr. Cuthbert were really to commit the great folly of offering his aristocratical hand, and very ample fortune, to our little Harry, I should not be able to say this very much longer.”

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To this letter, which contained a page or two more than I have transcribed, concerning the symptoms of growing admiration which the watchful mother fancied she perceived in their visitor towards her young daughter, she speedily received an answer, from which the following lines are an extract :

“ I don’t think, my dear Mary, that I can honestly congratulate you on the great improvement which you speak of in Harriet’s looks. I am by no means disposed to believe, from what I have seen of the world, that personal beauty, particularly in females, is any very desirable distinction. I have uniformly observed, on the contrary, that the young women who are noted for particular comeliness never do make such steady and useful servants as those who are not. However, my dear old friend, I silence my alarms on this score, by remembering the notoriously true adage, that every mother thinks her own goose a swan.

“ And as to Mr. Cuthbert’s attentions, my dear Mary, don’t, pray, torment yourself by dwelling on any such very silly thoughts. That is, indeed, taking up sorrow at interest—a sort of wrong-minded activity, which I should be very sorry to see you fall into. Depend upon it, my good friend, the same feeling of respect for your very worthy husband which induced this gentleman to renew his acquaintance with him in the highly flattering manner he has done, is the real source of all the attention you have observed. His having made the youngest of Mr. Hartwell’s two children the object of this obliging notice, rather than her elder sister, greatly strengthens this opinion, as his doing so, I have little or no doubt, has arisen from his feeling that your little Harry, being so mere a child in age, might receive all this good-natured and flattering sort of civility without any danger of its being misinterpreted. Though I am neither a mother, nor married, my dear Mary, I am not without experience in these matters, and have, I believe, a naturally strong propensity for observation. This experience has not been thrown away. My brother was married many years before you, my dear friend, and the youngest of his three daughters is twenty-five years old. It is now just twelve years since he invited me, upon the death of my mother,

to make my home with him, that I might supply the loss of his wife to his children and household. I flatter myself that I have never neglected the duties which fell upon me by my acceptance of this invitation ; and in one respect, at least, I am sure that I have not done so—namely, in the watchfulness with which I have attended to his daughters. I think, Mary, that I may venture to say, no man, certainly no single man, ever addressed a word to either of them in my presence without my finding out, in some way or other, what it was about ; and I do assure you, my dear old friend, that the experience I have gained in this manner is of a kind that may be very safely trusted to. Depend upon it, I have had my wits about me, and that I have never *mis-understood* anything. I heartily hope you may be able to say as much by the time your eldest charge shall have attained the age of thirty-four years, as mine has done. Take my word for it, Mary, Mr. Cuthbert has no more intention of proposing to Harriet than he has of proposing to me. So make yourself easy upon that matter. As to what you say respecting your all but noble neighbour, Mrs. Osterly, I confess I have been a good deal pained by it. You began life, my good old friend, by entertaining very irrational, and, I might say, improper notions respecting the value of wealth and station so long as it shall please God to permit us to remain in our present state of existence. What is to happen to us afterwards, of course we cannot tell—at least, not exactly ; but I believe there are many very good people with whom the words of the Bible, about giving unto Cæsar everything that belongs to him, have great weight, both as to this life and the next.

“I have made a particular point, my dear friend, and I cannot but think you must be aware of it—I have, I say, made a particular point, a very particular point, of never alluding to the advantages you lost by preferring the Vicarage of Penmorris to the fine mansion at Knowles Park, and I only mention it now for the sake of pointing out to you, in a manner clear enough to be useful, the wrongness of your accusing Mrs. Osterly of pride in her demeanour towards you and your family. What you think haughtiness, my good Mary, is only a proper knowledge of life, and a feeling of propriety, which, in my eyes, is extremely respectable, relative to the manner in which one class of persons should behave themselves towards another class. Do not, however, think, my dear, that I mean to reprove you, nor suffer yourself, by any means, to suppose that the circumstance of my mother's uncle having been Lord Chancellor of England has any influence upon my mind in the view which I take of all matters of etiquette. If I know my own heart, this connection, high as it is, has never

produced any invidious effect upon my conduct or manners to persons differently situated to myself. It may, occasionally, perhaps, have made me more anxious, and more actively careful than I might otherwise have been, to prevent the daughters of my brother from forming alliances which might lead the world to suppose that this connection was forgotten. But so far, I conceive, no one, in station above the very lowest rabble, could be found to blame me."

CHAPTER III.

No intelligent reader can doubt the sound judgment and excellent good sense of the lady from whose letter to Mrs. Hartwell I have made the foregoing extract. But even such a mind as hers may occasionally fail, when trusting to its prophetic powers; and so it happened in the present instance. The visit of Mr. Cuthbert at the Vicarage, however, was only prolonged to the moderate term of a week and a day; for, no sooner did Mrs. Osterly receive the news of his arrival in her neighbourhood, and of his intended visit to her Manor House, than she took prompt measures for her return to it; for Mr. Cuthbert was one of those happy individuals to whom all the world seem agreed to do honour, and homage, and favour, and kindness, and hospitality, and benevolence, and everything else that is flattering and amiable, for no other reason, as it seemed, than because he really wanted nothing that anybody could bestow upon him.

Either habit or temper, however, had taught him to receive all this as so completely a matter of course, that he never testified, or indeed felt, any very great sense of obligation, or gratitude, for anything that could be done for him.

He had once been a father for a few months, and the loss of his child he deplored, for he certainly felt that it was in some sort a part of himself. But not so did he feel the loss of its mother, which took place a few months afterwards; and to say truth, she was a wife that few men would have regretted, for she was both ugly and cross; but having also been rich and noble, such a degree of observance towards her was necessary while she lived, as to render her death a very pleasant event to her husband.

For about a year after his restoration to liberty, he seemed to think of nothing but enjoying it; and as people in those unpeaceful days could not run abroad, as they do now, upon perceiving within themselves a particular ~~wish for a settlement~~, he

took to changing his residence in England with a sort of persevering caprice that made it quite impossible for those most familiar with him to guess in what part of the United Kingdom he would be the least unlikely to be found.

He had no less than four very handsome country seats, all sufficiently kept up to permit an occasional residence at either, and no year passed without his spending a week or two at each. He possessed also an excellent house in Cavendish Square, and there, too, he was in the habit of lodging himself every now and then.

But, notwithstanding all this, his residence of predilection was unquestionably at Bath: for, in the days of which I speak, it enjoyed a degree of fashionable attraction that would be difficult to explain, or describe, to young people of the present day. In all these various and frequent migrations, Mr. Cuthbert continued to make himself extremely popular; but it was a popularity of a peculiar kind. Nobody thought him particularly clever, and there was nothing about him to suggest the idea of that sort of cordial good-humour which results from kind-heartedness and a happy temper. He was certainly very well-looking; but this advantage has no very decided tendency to make men popular with men, and the popularity of Mr. Cuthbert was almost as great among gentlemen as among ladies.

I think it is Sterne who tells a story of a man who begged in the public streets with success unprecedented, and quite unaccountable, till it was discovered that his habit was to address a 'ben trovato' personal compliment, rather whispered than whining, to every one from whom he asked an alms. This man had discovered that vanity was a powerful passion. Mr. Cuthbert made the same discovery respecting hope; and his habit was to awaken the pleasant sensations to which it gives birth in all whose liking and favour he wished to propitiate.

When he took up his abode, for a few days perhaps, at one of his country mansions, he was by no means in the habit of sending out a multitude of dinner invitations to bring his neighbours round him, but was wont to mount his showy horse, both himself and his steed being dressed to perfection, and, followed by a still gayer steed, whose point-de-vise rider might have sat as the model of a groom, to ride forth on a regulated circuit of visits, which, in the course of two or three mornings, enabled him to call on all whom he thought proper to consider as his neighbours.

One short sample of his conversation on these occasions will explain his system. It shall be taken from a visit made to a family consisting of a gentleman, his lady, two daughters, and a son.

MR. CUTHBERT.—“I wish to Heaven you would teach me your secret, Sir James! I never was so struck by any place in my life as I was this morning by yours. Upon my soul, it is perfect! And I remember its producing exactly the same delightful impression upon me when I was here last. There is something in the aspect of this country that perfectly enchants me! I don't think I shall be able to resist it much longer. I cannot deny that I have other mansions which, perhaps, have greater claims upon me than any place here; but I am quite sure that it is here I shall fix myself at last. And then, I flatter myself, I shall be able to bring my neighbours about me. I mean to fit up the great hall as a theatre. I have one or two first-rate amateur performers among my town friends, and if we can get a few recruits here, we might manage to play once a fortnight, with an unceremonious sort of a supper, and a ball after it.”

This is a fair specimen of the style by which he for many years excited the hopes of the four neighbourhoods in which he possessed residences, and which hopes invariably manifested themselves by unceasing invitations to dinner, as long as he remained within reach of them. From the hour of his birth to that at which he has been presented to the reader, he had never made an intimate friend—nay, not even a really intimate acquaintance. Neither had he made any enemies. Here and there, he had caught the attention of a character-fancier, who had amused himself by watching the smooth surface which the gentlemanlike Mr. Cuthbert presented to everybody, and the absolutely no-character, that seemed to occupy the vacuum under it; while a keenly-scrutinizing glance might bring to view such a perfect specimen of unalloyed selfishness, as is rarely to be found so entirely free from the mixture of any other feeling as it was in him.

This remarkable unity of feeling produced a very rational unity of conduct. Mr. Cuthbert never got into any scrapes of any kind; he never rode further or faster than was conducive to his health and comfort; and never ate more dinner, or drank more wine, than he could venture upon with perfect safety; but then, he atoned to himself for this forbearance by taking very especial care that everything he ate, and everything he drank, was of the finest and most dainty quality, so that, upon a fair computation, he derived considerably more gratification from the table than the majority of those who were considered (but wrongfully) as more keenly devoted to it than himself.

Such was the man who now honoured the little Vicarage of Penmorris with his presence. He had removed his quarters from the Osterly Arms, to the abode of his old acquaintance, rather late in the evening; for the visit during which his dis-

appointment respecting the absence of Mrs. Osterly had been disclosed, was made at three o'clock, so that the vicarage dinner, always served punctually at two, was over, and, fortunately for the feelings of Mrs. Hartwell, every trace of it removed from the ordinary sitting-room which the family usually inhabited, save, perhaps, some slight odour of the cucumber and mint-sauce, which had accompanied the cold lamb that had made an essential part of the repast.

This odour, however, had produced no painful effect on the nerves of Mr. Cuthbert—on the contrary, it made him feel hungry; a sensation which he always hailed with pleasure.

But whether this would have been sufficient to make him venture on the dangerous experiment of trusting for all his comforts, during several successive days, to so humble a household, may very fairly be doubted—but it certainly was not the only attraction. He was still in the act of communicating to his old acquaintance his disappointed project for passing a few days at the Manor House, when 'the vicar's two daughters entered the room together.

Notwithstanding the acute suspicion of the excellent and very sensible Miss Margaret Johnson, respecting the probable maternal partiality of Mrs. Hartwell, in the opinion she had expressed of her youngest daughter's beauty, Harriet Hartwell really was an extremely beautiful girl.

Mr. Cuthbert was far from ever having had the reputation of being a gay man, but, nevertheless, he was by no means insensible to the charm of beauty, and during by far the greater part of his life he had basked in that sunshine of smiles, which wealthy single gentlemen, whether widowers or bachelors, are sure to find ready for them; but, probably more from his steady continuance in his single condition, than from any very perceptible diminution in his personal attractions, he had for the last few years become aware of the exceedingly disagreeable fact, that the young ladies did not think him quite so young as he used to be.

He was very deeply disgusted with the pretty creature who first made him aware that such were her notions concerning him; and scarcely less so by similar indications, which, from time to time, became perceptible to him afterwards; but the ultimate result of this sort of schooling was not, as some may suppose, the final abandonment of the gallantry of a young man, and the wise determination of sitting down quietly in the character of an old one, but a desperate resolution of turning, what had hitherto been idle sport, into very serious earnest. In other words, he at last made up his mind that he would marry again, if it were only to punish the young ladies who seemed to take him for an old man, by showing them how much they had lost.

This resolution had been taken very firmly and resolutely, and he still remained steadfastly determined to act upon it; but he was quite aware that he ought not to be rash or over-hasty in selecting the fortunate young lady upon whom he was about to bestow so many inestimable advantages. He had already seen one or two, during the year which had elapsed since he had finally made up his mind to marry, whom he thought would suit him extremely well, because they appeared so ready to do everything they were asked to do, and were so well calculated to excite the envy of all the other pretty young ladies, who had appeared to forget that he was single, by setting off to advantage the jewels, and the satins, and the equipage, which it was his purpose to display on the occasion.

But in each of these fair ones he had, after a little deliberate examination, discovered some defect, either in person or demeanour, which had checked his declaration just in time; and at the moment when Harriet Hartwell first appeared before him, he was still a free man, but without feeling the least wish to preserve his freedom.

As far as Mr. Cuthbert was concerned, the first three minutes of their first interview was amply sufficient to settle the question as to who was to be the future mistress of Corwyn Castle, in North Wales; of Methwold Abbey, in Shropshire; of Cuthbert House, in the county of Kent; of the Grange, in Norfolk; and of one of the handsomest houses in Cavendish Square.

But during these three minutes he said very little indeed.

Mr. Hartwell, on the entrance of the young ladies, had introduced them by saying, "My daughters—Mr. Cuthbert." Upon which Mr. Cuthbert rose, and while Mary carelessly placed herself upon the window-seat, after making a rather shy little curtsy to the stranger, he presented very respectfully a chair to her younger sister, who, with less shyness, as it seemed, but more of embarrassment, stood beautifully blushing—but smiling also—as if not quite certain whether she ought to sit or stand.

His offer of a chair, however, decided the question; and, as she accepted it, she looked at him in a manner so expressive of being very much flattered, and very much obliged, that his mind was instantly made up upon the choice of a wife.

The question as to whether he should await the return of his cousin at the Vicarage, or immediately return to London himself, was resumed, but it soon appeared that it was no longer a question; for Mr. Cuthbert's acceptance of the vicar's offered hospitality was prompt, decisive, and cordial.

He contrived, too, in a very gentlemanlike manner, to scrutinize the form and features of the beautiful Harriet, till he had satisfied himself that they were faultless, and then he rose and took his departure, leaving the vicar half frightened at what he

had done, and half pleased at the opportunity it gave him of returning, in some small degree, the often-repeated hospitalities of the Manor House, which Mrs. Osterly's sense of dignity prevented his ever being able to repay to her in person—a morning visit, about twice a-year, being the only approach to visiting on her part, that she had ever permitted herself.

Twelve sumptuous dinners, however, in every year, were, with scrupulous punctuality, bestowed by her upon the vicar and his family; and she would unquestionably have considered a refusal of any of these periodical invitations, on their part, as a want of respect which would scarcely have been too severely punished by the vicar's suspension from clerical functions by his bishop. As no such refusal, however, had ever occurred, she held him and his wife in very great respect, and considered their daughters as very modest, prettily-behaved, young women, on whom she was well pleased to bestow the distinction of dining at her table.

What would have happened to her, could she have been made conscious of all that was passing in the heart and head of her highly connected and highly respected relative, during the days which preceded her return to her Manor House in order to receive him, it is impossible to say.

It is by no means improbable that the shock might, is very suddenly given, have been fatal; fortunately, however, the good lady remained in most unsuspecting security, and fixed the day of her return with less of feverish haste than she would have done, had she not received from Mr. Cuthbert the satisfactory assurance that he found himself very comfortable at the Vicarage.

CHAPTER IV.

AND Mr. Cuthbert certainly was very comfortable. Mrs. Hartwell, notwithstanding her strong conviction that he was a very silly old gentleman, was not only extremely civil to him, but thinking that, according to her old-fashioned notions, it was the duty of a wife to make the guests invited by her husband feel that they were well accommodated in her house, she gave him what he valued a vast deal more than her civility—a good breakfast, dinner, and supper every day.

For though the ordinary mode of living at the Vicarage was very plain and simple, it was not because the vicar's lady was ignorant of the more refined branches of the art of cooking. On the contrary, she perfectly well knew how, with her own hands, and by the aid of her really delicate palate, to compose

several soups and ragouts which it would have been impossible to deny were very good.

She knew nothing, indeed, of the various French dishes, without which no dinner of the present day can be very heartily approved; but her mock-turtle soups, her à-la-mode beef, her spring chickens and asparagus, with the home-fed highly-flavoured hams, for which Penmorris Vicarage was celebrated, together with excellent trout, fresh taken out of the stream, and the occasional aid of such lamb and cucumbers as I have already alluded to, sufficed, for the period of one week and a day, to prevent the pampered aristocrat from suffering any serious inconvenience from the rustic style of his entertainment.

Even in the more delicate and difficult matter of wines, he was less annoyed by the unpretending cellar of the humble vicar than he would have been at a table of much greater pretension, where wines of high-sounding names were found of poor flavour.

Mr. Hartwell would as soon have thought of commissioning the Penmorris and Exeter carrier to bring him a few dozen of bottled sunbeams from Naples, as claret or champagne, or any other wine of French production; but then his port and sherry were first-rate, and of the price which a man with six hundred a year can afford to give to the far-between visits of his friends, if he requires for his ordinary use no vintage more costly than what his gooseberry and elder bushes furnish, assisted by a moderate daily contribution from "John Barleycorn."

And thus the highly-refined Mr. Cuthbert, though lodged and boarded in a style that was certainly very novel to him, was, nevertheless, sufficiently removed from any tormenting anxieties concerning what might be offered to him to eat, to enable him to feel himself at leisure to fall in love. And really, to any gentleman so greatly pre-disposed to do this as was Mr. Cuthbert, the opportunity he now enjoyed might have been found irresistible, even had Harriet Hartwell been much less lovely than she was.

Such very good dinners as Mrs. Hartwell thought it right to give the old acquaintance of her husband, who was, moreover, first cousin to the lady of the manor, could not possibly have been obtained had she trusted too implicitly to the science of her cook, Jenny, who, to say the truth, had been hired chiefly on the strength of her acknowledged skill in the dairy, and of her happy knack of making bread without ever finding it necessary to complain of the yeast.

The upper maid Susan, who really was a superior sort of person, and considered to be so by everybody in the parish, had fortunately a very pretty notion of making pie-crust, so

that part of the business was fearlessly entrusted to her; nevertheless, Mrs. Hartwell was by no means sufficiently at leisure to pass the whole morning doing needlework in the best parlour (which during this important week was made the daily sitting room), but, as they had altered their dinner hour to four, in compliance with the habits of their guest, she always came into it, looking the very picture of neat, rustic ladyism, at three; and day by day became more aware as she did so that Mr. Cuthbert neither regretted her absence nor that of her husband, who, like herself, could not spare all the hours of so long a morning for sitting in state in the best parlour.

And by what means can I make my readers best understand how an old gentleman very nearly sixty, and two young girls, the eldest of whom was just about forty years his junior, could contrive to pass the interval between a nine o'clock breakfast and a four o'clock dinner without being irresistibly impelled to run away from each other? Harriet Hartwell kept a journal, and an extract or two from this will throw more light upon the subject than any narrative.

"May 20th, 1810.—A strange gentleman, called Mr. Cuthbert, made papa a visit to-day, and he is coming to stay in the house. How very odd it seems! This Mr. Cuthbert is first cousin to Mrs. Osterly, and I am sure if I had been told yesterday that a first cousin of hers was coming to stay here, I should have been frightened out of my wits, and now, I don't know why, but I can't help being quite pleased at it. It really is altogether so very odd. I suppose it is just possible that a cousin of Mrs. Osterly's might be a little less great and a little less grand than herself, and then it would not all seem so very strange. But this is not at all the case in this instance; on the contrary, though Mr. Cuthbert is as affable as she is proud, he must in reality be a person of much more consequence than she is; for I never heard of her having any other house than the one she lives in here, but Mr. Cuthbert has four or five houses at the very least, and though he is so very far from being a proud boasting person, it is impossible not to see, from just the few words he says about them, that they must all be very fine places. It certainly is a most extraordinary chance that we should have such a person staying in the house with us, and he talks to Mary and me with no more pride or stiffness than if we were as great people as himself. I do think he is the most delightful person I ever saw."

"21st.—How can Mary be so utterly insensible to the charm of such manners as Mr. Cuthbert's! He is not a young man; of course, I know that as well as she does. But what can it signify, in the way of liking or disliking, whether a person is young or old? All I know is, that if he were a thousand, I

should still say he was the most agreeable man I ever saw. We are always reading in books about graceful manners, and the charm of a good manner, and even our old copy book tells us that 'manners make the man.' If I never understood all this before, I perfectly understand it now. And never was anything more true."

"22nd.—What a very happy day this has been! And that, for no reason in the world but because it has been passed, from morning to night, in the company of an elegant gentleman, who seems to know everything in the world, and yet has kindness enough not to despise those who know nothing. What can Mary find to laugh at in him? If I did not know what a dear, generous girl she was, and how greatly above any such weakness, I should be tempted to think that she was not quite pleased at his talking so much more to me than to her. But I won't believe that such a thought ever entered her head; besides it would be unjust as well as foolish, for how would it be possible for him to talk to her as much as he does to me? Whenever he does attempt to lead her into conversation, she looks as skittish as a young colt afraid of being caught, and is sure to make some excuse for getting out of the way. I am sure I wonder that it does not offend him; and besides, it is very wrong, if it were only because her behaving so obliges me to be more civil to him perhaps than I ought to be. But how can I help it?"

"23rd.—I wish dear darling mamma would not encourage Mary so, in laughing at everything Mr. Cuthbert says; I cannot conceive what her motive can be for doing so. It is quite impossible that she should really think him ridiculous merely because he is handsome, elegant, rich, and well born. So very clever as mamma is herself, it does seem impossible to me that she should not admire Mr. Cuthbert. She must have some reason or other for behaving as she does about him, and I certainly do wish I could find it out. Perhaps she thinks that his condescending kindness may lead us to forget the great distance there is between us; and that when Mrs. Osterly comes home, she may find us less afraid of her than we used to be. And if this is her notion I am not sure that she is quite wrong. As far as I am concerned, at least, I confess that I do not think I ever shall be so much afraid of Mrs. Osterly as I used to be; for if such a man as Mr. Cuthbert can find out that I am neither too young, too ignorant, nor too silly for him to converse with, I shall not think it very easy to believe that I need be absolutely afraid to open my lips in the presence of Mrs. Osterly. But oh! what a difference between her manners and those of her cousin! She never speaks to any of us, I think, without intending that we shall understand that she

only does so in a spirit of Christian humility, which, while it does immense honour to us on earth, will be of some service to herself in heaven ; while Mr. Cuthbert really contrives sometimes to make me think that I am doing him a favour when I take a walk in the garden with him."

"24th.—It really is too provoking to hear mamma and Mary go on as they do, laughing at everything Mr. Cuthbert says or does. They have now found out, it seems, that there is something extremely ridiculous in his being so well-looking. But I can bear even this, better than hearing mamma say, as she did to-day, when I came down into the best parlour before dinner, that she really believed I had serious thoughts of making a conquest of the old gentleman. She never calls him anything else when she speaks of him to me. But I don't care for that a farthing. The older he is, the greater compliment he pays me, when he addresses his delightful conversation to me ; but I do care for her hinting so broadly as she does (and this was not the first time either) at my dressing myself with more care than usual on purpose to please him. I am sure I would not dress to please any man in the world unless it were papa. It is not my fault if my hair curls naturally, and mamma should not say such things to me, even in joke. As to being careful in the way of putting on my things, and trying to look as neat and nice as I can while we have such a person staying in the house, let mamma and Mary laugh as much as they please, I shall most certainly go on doing so, because I am quite sure it is right and proper ; and if it was not that I should not like to talk upon such a silly subject to papa, still I would put it to him to say if it was right to take as much pains as we always do to look nice, when we are going to dine with Mrs. Osterly, merely because she treats us very much as mamma treats Mrs. Ellis at the shop, when she comes up at Christmas to pay us a visit, and to take no pains at all to make a good appearance in compliment to Mr. Cuthbert, merely because he treats us as if we were his equals. However, it does not signify. This visit is almost come to an end now, for Mrs. Osterly is to be at home on Wednesday, and of course he will take care to be at the Manor House to receive her ; and when it is over it is very likely, I think, that I shall be sorry it ever happened, for there is no great satisfaction in finding out that one is capable of enjoying good society, when there is so very little chance of one's ever meeting with it again ; for if we were to dine at Mrs. Osterly's once every week for the rest of our lives I should not call that enjoying good society. I, at least, could never enjoy anybody's society unless they gave me some reason to suppose they enjoyed mine a little in return.

"I never was aware of the great advantages of a college

education till now. There is something quite surprising to me in the idea of papa's having finished his education at the same college as Mr. Cuthbert ; and certainly papa is a very gentlemanlike person, and his manner to his old college friend is exactly what it ought to be, and I am sure Mr. Cuthbert thinks it so, for he treats him quite like an equal. Oh, what a difference between him and his stiff old cousin ! But perhaps this may be partly owing to the difference of age, for I should think Mr. Cuthbert was almost young enough to be Mrs. Osterly's son."

"25th.—How fast the days do go by ! The day after to-morrow is the last of Mr. Cuthbert's visit ! Well ; there will at least be the pleasure of thinking of it left ; and I am sure I always shall think of it with pleasure, and not with pleasure only, but improvement. It cannot but be advantageous to a girl like me, living in a little country village, thirty miles from Exeter, to have listened to the conversation of such a man as Mr. Cuthbert, as I have done. Besides, I cannot help thinking that I have gained a friend. There is something so very kind, I could almost say so affectionate, in Mr. Cuthbert's manner to me, that I cannot avoid believing he has a real regard for me. I think my mother and Mary have both of them been very wrong in not treating him with more freedom and cordiality. As to mamma, indeed, she has always been perfectly civil and polite, and has managed, dear clever soul, to give him a most beautiful welcome in the way of good dinners, and all that sort of thing ; but somehow or other, I don't think she has ever forgotten for a moment that he was first cousin to Mrs. Osterly, and this has made her what I call cold and stiff to him. But as to Mary, she has been a great deal worse than that, for she always looks either as if she were going to laugh or going to sleep, whenever he attempts to talk to her ; and it is no wonder, therefore, that he should treat me with a greater appearance of friendship and intimacy than either of them. Not, I am sure, that I ever did anything to make him particularly notice me, but I really did like to talk to him, and they did not ; and I suppose he found this out. At first, he offered to play backgammon with Mary as often as he did with me : but she made such a fuss about not being able to play well enough, that he very wisely, I think, left off teasing her any more about it, and that was the reason why I played backgammon with him every evening. Papa, of course, would have played with him instead, if it had not happened that he was called away the two first evenings, and then we seemed to get into the habit of playing together, and so it went on. If mamma could have played, it would have been different.—I cannot think what it is that makes mamma look so solemn

sometimes, I might almost say so cross, only that her dear sweet face never did, and never can look really cross—but it is very puzzling to see her look so terribly solemn every time almost that Mr. Cuthbert looks at me; and yet I am sure no countenance ever expressed more gentle good-will than his does, when he fixes his kind eyes upon my face. It is partly his looking at me so, that makes me think he must have a regard for me. At any rate, I am sure I have a regard for him; and I am also sure, that this regard is a great deal the stronger because mamma and Mary are so unfair about him. But it is folly to think about it at all so much, for everything will be over the day after to-morrow."

"26th.—We have spent our last day in the company of this kind friend and accomplished gentleman; but I for one feel, that though this pleasure is over, the improvement to be derived from it is not. I have learnt much that I hope I shall never forget. All that he said to me about the wrongness of running about the garden without hat or gloves, was spoken with as much earnest kindness as if he had been my nearest relation; and it shall be attended to for the sake of that kindness, if for nothing else. And I do not think any one will ever see me put an extinguisher upon a candle again in a drawing-room. He begged me to call our best parlour the drawing-room, and so I always shall do for his sake. He says too, that it will be much better for me to drink water than beer; and that also I shall attend to. About the use of the fork, which he has so kindly and carefully explained to me, I am afraid I shall find some little difficulty. It would be easy enough if our forks were like those at the Manor House, but they are so very different, not only because they are made of steel instead of silver, but because the shape is so inconvenient. I don't know what I shall do when the green peas come; but I would rather give up eating them, though they are such favourites, than do anything which he calls awkward and unladylike. And yet it would not signify much, for I don't suppose we shall ever see him again. There will be a pleasure though, in remembering all his kind little instructions; and that, at least, is a pleasure that I shall be sure to have, for I am quite certain that I shall never forget anything he has said to me. I only wish mamma and Mary had liked him as much, and then there really would have been very great pleasure in talking over everything when he was gone. But I know that if I were to mention his name, they would do nothing but laugh, and therefore I never will mention it, for I could not bear it."

"27th.—Oh! what a dismal day this has been! A thousand times more dismal than it would have been if papa, mamma, and Mary, had all felt as sorry about his going as I did; but

instead of this, I do believe that they all felt delighted that his visit was over. As to Mary, she goes jumping and hopping about, and looks as gay as a bird on a sunshiny morning. It is certainly the very oddest thing I ever knew, there being such a difference, I mean, between her feelings and mine, about Mr. Cuthbert ! I don't think we ever differed so much about anything in our whole lives before. I know that he must have seen that I liked him better than any of the rest did, which, of course, accounts for his manner to me being different. And it certainly was very different when the moment came for his going away. I dread their saying anything to me about it, they will laugh so about the tears coming into my eyes when he kissed my hand. But I am sure if my life had depended upon it I could not have helped it ! But let them laugh, if they will ; at my age I ought to be above caring for anybody laughing at me, when I know I don't deserve it. I wonder if I heard him rightly when I fancied he said, almost in a whisper, just as he was going away, ' We shall meet again, my dear Miss Harriet.' I am almost sure that these were the words, he said, but what he meant I don't know. But I believe I had better make a resolution neither to think nor to write any more about him. If he did say the words I have just put down, I suppose it is just possible that we may meet again, and if we do, there will be something worth writing about ; but if this never happens, it will be only folly, certainly, for me to go on in this way, filling up my journal book about a person whom I am never to see any more. It will be a great deal better to go back again to my old ways, and make memorandums about all the books I read, and the needlework I do ! "

How soon little Harry would have proved herself able to keep this very sensible resolution, if nothing had happened to interfere with it, would be difficult to say ; but circumstances speedily occurred which fully excused her not doing so.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. OSTERLY arrived at the Manor House so late in the evening of the 25th that the message immediately despatched to the Vicarage to announce her return, intimated that Mr. Cuthbert would not be expected that night, but the following morning, before the hour of luncheon. And accordingly, on the following morning before the hour of luncheon, that gentleman entered his travelling carriage, in order to traverse with

becoming dignity the space, which measured exactly three-quarters of a mile, between the two dwellings.

To say that he left the Vicarage with reluctance would not be true, for although he truly believed himself to be not passionately in love with the youngest of its fair inmates, he believed also that his going away was only a necessary part of the process which was to be gone through before he could finally arrange the happy event upon which he had really, at last, determined.

That Harriet Hartwell should be converted into Mrs. Cuthbert with as little delay as possible was a thing definitely fixed and decided upon in his mind, and that it was so, sufficiently proved the ardour and sincerity of his feelings; but, nevertheless, he had no sort of intention of scrambling through the business, like a wild-headed boy of five-and-thirty. He was more than five-and-thirty himself, and he felt thankful that he had not rashly made an earlier choice, which never could have obtained for him a bride so every way suitable to him and his position as the lovely creature whose evident attachment to him he meant to reward so nobly. But it did not follow that there was any necessity to neglect any of the preliminary formalities which ever ought to attend the arrangement of a marriage with a man of his station.

On reaching the Manor House, which he had not entered for above twenty years, he was struck with the apparent identity of everything he saw, with everything he remembered to have seen at his last visit, and smiled pleasantly to himself, as he thought that, after all, twenty years was not such a very long interval as the young and thoughtless were apt to imagine, and that in all cases where either men or things were taken proper care of, twenty years might pass over them with very little injury.

The venerable butler, who was several years older than himself, gave him a respectful bow and a respectful smile of recognition, which seemed to please Mr. Cuthbert even more than the immutability of the chairs, tables, bronzes, and busts of the entrance hall; and he entered the morning parlour of Mrs. Osterly in high spirits.

This was well, for high spirits were necessary in the presence of Mrs. Osterly for all persons who did not wish to feel an incessant consciousness that "man was made to mourn."

His visit at Penmorris Vicarage had certainly, in appearance, taken about a dozen years from the age of Mr. Cuthbert, and he walked up the room, and bent down to kiss the hand of his venerable cousin, with a graceful alacrity of movement which would greatly have enchanted Harriet Hartwell, if she had seen it. To rise from her chair at the approach of any guest

was a ceremony that Mrs. Osterly had long left off; but there was that within her which prevented the circumstance of her remaining seated, even when ladies presented themselves, from giving any air of ease or intimacy to the meeting.

She constantly sat in an immensely large arm-chair, not made at all after the modern fashion which unites elegance to ease, but constructed on a scale and in a form so ponderous and unwieldy, as rather to suggest the idea of its having originally made part of a bishop's throne in some Gothic cathedral. The ornaments of the back, which were of richly-carved ebony, rose in the centre to the height of at least three feet above her head, and the square wide-spreading arms, of the same material, could never have been reached at the same moment by both the elbows of any mortal woman. But there was good store of small square tapestry-covered cushions around her, which, albeit they had lost the fresher tints of their earlier years, plainly enough showed that they owed their origin to foreign needles, and were of course respected accordingly.

From this seat of little ease Mrs. Osterly bent forward her long neck and powdered head-dress, which no change of fashion could ever induce her to resign, and very solemnly pronounced the words, "Cousin! I hope I see you well."

"My dear lady!" replied Mr. Cuthbert, bending to bestow upon the withered, mitted fingers the respectful kiss already mentioned—"My dear lady! I am most exceedingly delighted to see you! Good Heaven! is it possible that so many years have passed since we last met?"

"It is rather more than twenty years, Cousin Cuthbert, since you last visited Penmorris Manor House, but I cannot say that I see anything in your appearance at all likely to surprise one, upon remembering that the interval has been so long. On the contrary, indeed, I should have thought that it had been longer still, when I look at you. I see that you wear a wig, Cousin Cuthbert, and very right and proper that you should, for as it is always an awkward thing for a man to wear a night-cap in company, there is no other way of making a bald old head feel comfortable; but I don't allude to your wig when I tell you that you look old, for that makes little difference, one way or the other; it is your general look that strikes me as being so more than commonly old, for your time of life—for I don't suppose that you can be much over sixty."

"Sixty!" exclaimed a voice from a recess formed by the only window of the small and gloomy room, "Sixty?" Dear me, ma'am, it is because I am sitting between you and the light, I suppose; for, upon my word and honour, the gentleman does not look an hour over forty."

These words were sweet, though the voice which uttered

them was not so ; but, nevertheless, Mr. Cuthbert's eyes followed the sound of it, and perceived a little lady, very thin, and evidently not very tall, seated on a high, straight-backed chair, which looked still more uncomfortable than that of her hostess. This little lady had herself scarcely yet arrived at the early period of existence which she so civilly named, as the utmost limit to which she could conceive it possible that Mr. Cuthbert had as yet arrived ; but, nevertheless, her face, and not only her face but her whole person, had a shrivelled look that might easily have been mistaken for the index of more advanced age. Her features were small, and by no means either ugly or irregular, save that the tip of her nose seemed to contain all the blood which her dry little body could afford for the use of the face, every other part of which was of a yellow white, and slightly marked by the small-pox—a misfortune greatly more common in those days than in our own. The eyes were small, black, and very restless ; and the neatly-formed mouth had an unceasing smile at work about it, which unluckily was not of the most amiable expression, so that Harriet Hartwell was wont to declare that, to look at, she was the perfect model of a wicked fairy ; though the notorious fact that she bore the constant 'snubbings' (unhappily there is no elegant word to express this species of persecution) of her proud patroness with imperturbable submission, seemed to indicate the absence of all malignity.

When Mr. Cuthbert turned his eyes towards her, she made a bow, which he of course returned, and this seemed to be considered by both as an introduction, probably because the possibility of any other never suggested itself to either : Mr. Cuthbert knowing, with all the certainty of inspiration, that the little lady was the humble companion of his aged relative (an office now known in all languages by the name of "*Dame de compagnie*,") and she being equally without doubt as to his being the "Cousin Cuthbert" whose visit she knew was expected.

To the difference of opinion expressed by this lady concerning her cousin's age, Mrs. Osterly condescended not to make any reply, but proceeded to say, "Sit down, Cousin Cuthbert,—sit down, and I beg you will make yourself at home ; your mother and mine were sisters, you know, and the relation is near enough to permit your feeling yourself at home in my house."

"Thank you, madam—thank you," was Mr. Cuthbert's reply, uttered in the sort of tone always used by a younger person to an older one, whenever this difference is strongly impressed upon the memory of the speaker ; "I hope," he added, a little raising his voice—"I hope I see you well, after your journey ?"

"You need not speak so loud, Cousin Cuthbert; I am not in the very least deaf, but perhaps you are?"

This was said in a scream so terribly shrill, that the luxurious Mr. Cuthbert was not at all likely to renew the offence which had brought upon him such a punishment.

His frightened look had probably something that she took for humility in it, for she immediately recovered her good humour, and said, in a kind, pitying sort of tone, "I am afraid, cousin, that my absence was an unlucky business for you. You must have been sadly put out of your way, by being obliged to lodge yourself at the Vicarage. I take it for granted that they live in a mighty poor sort of way, don't they?"

Mr. Cuthbert coloured, perhaps, as much as it is possible for a gentleman of his age to colour, as he heard the dwelling of his future bride thus disparagingly spoken of; and it may be, that the feelings which the lovely Harriet had inspired in his heart might have been very seriously shaken thereby, had they been uttered by any of the rich and high-born friends with whom it was his glory to mix in London or in Bath; but as it was, this attack had little or rather no effect upon his constancy. Mrs. Osterly's reception had inspired him with the most profound contempt, together with a tolerably strong feeling of personal dislike towards her; and there was something not only faithful, but youthful, in the species of sprightly opposition which he found rising within him against all that the stiff, antiquated, musty, detestable old woman could say against the lovely creature whom he had just left in tears for his departure, or against her home either.

After an interval of a moment, he replied in a very young and lively tone, "Oh dear, no, my good lady!—quite the contrary, I assure you."

"What's quite the contrary?—and quite contrary to what?" returned Mrs. Osterly, knitting her brows and shaking her head, with a look both puzzled and displeased.

"I mean to say, my dear madam," replied Mr. Cuthbert, in a very gay and juvenile tone, "that you have done yourself great wrong by never venturing, if only for the sake of a little variety, to exchange your old Manor House for an occasional dinner-party at the Vicarage, for you would have found that, so far from living in the deplorable sort of way you seem to imagine, my old college friend has a house and establishment on a scale sufficiently liberal to satisfy the wishes of any gentleman whose profession places him, of necessity, in retirement."

Mrs. Osterly placed a hand upon each of the huge arms of her majestic chair, and leaning forward, eyed her elegant relative with an odd sort of sarcastic scrutiny, from the top

of his head to his shoe-tie ; for in the year 1812, gentlemen—ay, and very fashionable gentlemen—of fifty-six and a half, did not wear boots, unless they were dressed for the saddle.

"Satisfy the wishes of any gentleman?" exclaimed the old lady. "Now, Heaven forbid, Mr. Cousin Cuthbert, that you should turn out a Jacobin upon my hands!"

"Upon my word, madam, you have no cause to fear anything of the kind," replied the vehemently aristocratic Mr. Cuthbert, with some slight appearance of indignation ; "I should have hoped my Cousin Osterly would have considered my name and my station in society as sufficient guarantee against any such abomination."

"And so I should, John Frederick Augustus Cuthbert, had not your language in speaking of that worthy parish priest, our respectable vicar, been of so very levelling a nature," replied the stiff old lady, with a frown.

"I should be very sorry, Cousin Margaret Diana Osterly, to renew our long-interrupted intercourse by a dispute, which dispute would be the more objectionable, because I am convinced we are both of the same opinion on this subject. Trust me, honoured cousin, that no aristocrat was ever hung upon a lamp-post, who hated the levelling faction more heartily than I do."

"Nay, then," said she, "there is no great danger of our quarrelling, cousin ; for, after all, you know, there can be no differences of opinion that can signify much, provided we think alike on this point. And as to the parson's dinners and suppers, I will give you leave to be as tolerant as you please, provided you never really forget the difference of your stations."

"No, no, madam," he replied ; "I never do, or can forget difference of station, for a moment : and Heaven forbid I should ! Sooner, far sooner, would I forget my mother-tongue. But to men, educated as I have been at the University, my dear lady, the difference in station between a beneficed clergyman and a gentleman of large landed property, appears less than that which divides the aristocracy from any other class, because we never lose sight of the important fact, that a beneficed clergyman may become a bishop. Towards curates, of course, the feeling is different, in proportion as the distance between us is greater."

"Yes, yes, cousin—I understand that," returned Mrs. Osterly, briskly ; "there is great truth and excellent judgment shown in what you now say. The only difference between us is, that I seem to place on the same level with curates all the persons whose situation appears to make their becoming bishops too highly improbable to be reasonably thought of. No one can pos-

sibly be more ready to allow that a bishop ought to be considered as a gentleman than I am ; but, nevertheless, I should by no means think it right to treat all the vicars in England, or all the rectors either, as my equals, merely because it was just possible that it might please his Majesty's ministers to make bishops of them."

"Certainly not—most assuredly not!" replied Mr. Cuthbert, with warmth; "neither can you, I should hope, suspect me of any such folly. But in the case of my friend Hartwell, it is a very different affair, for I have very sufficient reason for believing that he has an excellent good chance of being raised to the bench, at no very distant period."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs. Osterly, with very genuine astonishment; "he has never in his life uttered a word to me which could lead me to suppose he had any such hope. Did he mention it to you, cousin, as arising from any sudden and unexpected circumstance?"

"He never mentioned it to me at all, my dear madam," replied Mr. Cuthbert, rather mysteriously; "but my knowledge of the very great probability of this event arises from a far different source, and one to which, as I am sure you must be aware, it would not be proper that I should allude more plainly. To him or his family I have not breathed the slightest hint on the subject; but to you, the circumstance of my having been staying with him for a week, made me wish to mention it. You will understand this very natural feeling, I am sure, and will not repeat to any one the confidence I have placed in you. On the discretion of this lady," turning to the humble companion, "I have no doubt that I may rest with equal confidence."

"Of course you may, Cousin Cuthbert. I am not such a fool, and that I think you must know already, as to keep a spy and informer about me."

"I have given the best proof that I do know it, by the openness with which I have already spoken," replied Mr. Cuthbert, feeling almost as much in love with himself as with the beautiful Harriet, for the exquisite skill with which he had began the difficult task of propitiating his haughty relative's favour for the young beauty he intended to convert into her cousin-german. Nor had he invented this mitre in the clouds solely with a view to the future. He flattered himself, and not without reason, that the lady of the Manor would consider an immediate display of friendly hospitality to the future bishop as a duty by no means to be neglected. To his very great satisfaction, she speedily replied, by saying, "I have every reason to be perfectly well satisfied with the conduct of Mr. Hartwell, and that of his family also, during the whole of his long ministry in my parish, and I certainly shall not let

them leave it without showing them that I am sensible of the perfect propriety of their conduct. As you speak in so friendly a manner of them, Cousin Cuthbert, I presume you will have no objection to my sending them an invitation to dine at the Minor House, during your stay with me?"

"So far from it, my dear lady, that I protest to you I should see them dining at your table every day with the greatest pleasure. I believe Mr. Hartwell's principles to be perfectly sound; and I confess to you, that in these very critical days, I think it highly advantageous in every way to cultivate a very close intimacy with men of this description, who are, or who are likely to be, in positions which give them influence. I verily believe, my dear cousin, that in the remote retirement of your peaceful Cornish property, you have little or no idea of the horrible heresies, both political and religious, which are daily becoming more and more boldly avowed in the great Babylon of London. It is a fearful epoch, my dear Mrs. Osterly—a very fearful epoch, I assure you; and such a bishop as my friend Hartwell is likely to make, ought to be cherished by all who do not wish to hear Tom Paine preached instead of St. Paul."

As Mr. Cuthbert proceeded in this diplomatic harangue, the countenance of Mrs. Osterly became more and more instinct with religious and political feeling; her eyes became very wide open, and her brows involuntarily raised themselves with a movement which gave to her hair—powdered and frizzled as it was—the peculiar look which we are wont to describe by saying that the hair "stands on end."

"Are things going so badly with us as that, Cousin Cuthbert?" said she. "I take a weekly paper, although it is certainly a very heavy expense; but I do it upon principle, that I may be able to judge, not only for myself but for my tenants and dependents also, as to the probability of immediate invasion. The power of preparing for this awful event would, of course, be very greatly increased, by my knowing when it was likely to happen. But my paper has never made me aware of the horrible state of things that you now mention. Gracious Heaven!" she continued, clasping her hands together, and piously raising them above her head; "to think that I should live to hear that there was a likelihood of Tom Paine taking place of St. Paul!"

"It is very painful to make such a statement," replied Mr. Cuthbert with a sigh—"but I think that every man who comes from the capital on a visit to the provinces is guilty of a great sin, if he shrinks from stating the truth respecting all the great political and religious movements, with which none who do not reside near the seat of government can be acquainted. But

I am sorry, my dear cousin, if I have spoken so strongly as to alarm you. Alarmed in some degree you certainly ought to be, but I would not willingly give you pain, if I could honestly avoid it."

"There is no great good, as far as I can see, in living in the dark, Cousin Cuthbert," replied the old lady—"and I don't think at all the worse of you for speaking as you have done. It is the only way that any gentleman, deserving the name, can speak. And as to what you say respecting my excellent clergyman, I will immediately prove to you how greatly I approve it. Instead of sending an invitation to the Vicarage in my usual manner, telling them that they may all come up and dine here to-morrow, I will drive down myself to-morrow morning and call upon them. It will be a matter of satisfaction to me, to be among the first to wish the worthy gentleman joy of his approaching preferment."

"I really feel, my dear cousin, that the honour of a visit from you is a compliment that he and his family well deserve; and it is by such efforts on the part of the higher classes, that the more estimable part of his profession are best led to the strict performance of their duty—which duty, in my estimation, includes the preaching of sound political as well as of sound religious doctrine."

"Indeed you are right, my dear sir," she replied. "Your words have that sort of real wisdom in them, without which, no principles are worth having," continued the old lady, with emphasis—"and I am thankful to find that the nearest relation I have is a man to whom I may listen, with the most perfect confidence, on all subjects."

"You are very kind to say so, my dear madam; and I hope I shall never give you cause to change your opinion. But before you make your promised visit, I must remind you that, as a matter of good faith and honourable dealing towards the distinguished personage from whom I have obtained my information respecting the intentions of his Majesty's government on this subject, not one single word must be said by either of us in the way of congratulation to the future bishop; I gave a very solemn promise that no hint of his approaching preferment should reach him by my means. I feel confident that you will oblige me, my dear cousin, by remembering this."

The lady gave the promise very gravely, assuring him, at the same time, that notwithstanding the retirement in which she lived, she was quite aware of the great importance of keeping state secrets, whenever they happened to be confided to her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE dinner at the Manor House, notwithstanding the silver tureen in which the soup was served, the silver sauce-tureens to match, and the silver covers that punctiliously preserved the heat of every dish, great and small, which made its appearance on the table, appeared to Mr. Cuthbert very far from being as appetising and agreeable as those which he had eaten at the Vicarage.

Yet the dinner was a very good dinner, and the wealthy and venerable relative who presided at it was much more courteously attentive to him than it was her usual practice to be to any one.

But, however impossible the more juvenile part of the world may think it, that a man near sixty should be in love, Mr. Cuthbert had most unquestionably enough of the tender passion alive within him at that time to make every place where the object of it was not, a great deal less agreeable to him than any place where she was.

Nor was Mr. Cuthbert, perhaps, the only old gentleman who might have preferred the perfectly unornamented little table at the Vicarage, with Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell, and their two young daughters doing its honours, to the greatly too-large and greatly too-decorated one at the Manor House, with Mrs. Osterly at the top and Miss Shriuffy at the bottom of it.

Yet, certainly, nothing could be more marked and flattering than the attentions paid him by both these last-mentioned ladies; as, for instance, Mrs. Osterly, who carved everything herself, invariably helped him first, although his sex seemed to render such a proceeding impossible; excepting, indeed, upon one occasion, when, perceiving that the piece of trout, which a servant was in the act of taking to him, was of a paler tint than another which she was about to send to Miss Shriuffy, she raised her voice just as the plate reached him, and said, "Take it to her, William! I have found a better one for Mr. Cuthbert."

Nor was Miss Shriuffy herself at all less desirous of making his visit agreeable as far as her little power extended. One of her most important functions was making tea, and any one who had watched the abounding liberality with which she bestowed strength, sugar, and cream, upon his oft-returning tea-cup, would have known how to appreciate her feelings towards him.

But, nevertheless, the image of the blushing Harriet, as she

selected the flowery potato for him at dinner, or sprinkled, unasked, a little salt upon his muffin at tea, recurred with inconceivable obstinacy to his memory every time he looked at either of his two obliging companions, and his sixty years did in no degree prevent his very heartily wishing himself back at the Vicarage again.

The tedium of the evening, however, was rendered considerably less intolerable by a pool at 'tredille', a game now almost forgotten, but which, in the year 1812, was still sufficiently in fashion to be welcomed as a consolation by many a trio, as a remedy against the ennui of a party too small to be sure of the sufficiency of their own resources.

The little breakfast table of the following morning afforded the enamoured gentleman all the comfort that good coffee, home-made rolls, and potted shrimps could bestow; but the hours really dragged very heavily with him until eleven o'clock, which was the time fixed by Mrs. Osterly for their visit to the Vicarage; and it was fixed thus early, not for the kind purpose of gratifying the impatience of Mr. Cuthbert, which was of course not guessed at, but in order to enable her and her cousin to return to the Manor House luncheon without running any risk of delaying it a moment beyond the usual hour.

There really was a very considerable degree of genuine anxiety and eagerness in the glance which Mr. Cuthbert sent through the Vicarage parlour-window, as he and his cousin walked from the little gate at which the carriage had set them down, in the hope of discovering the fair object of his thoughts and hopes, seated, as usual, at the little work-table, which, in such summerish weather as the present, was sure to be placed before an open window overlooking the garden.

Nor were his hopes disappointed. There, indeed, sat Harriet, —as fair, as fresh, and as sweetly blooming, as the roses which were just beginning to open their blossoms round the casement.

Mrs. Osterly walked but feebly, and never, when walking, thought of raising her eyes from the ground she was carefully reconnoitring in her progress, for the purpose of looking into her companion's face. Had it been otherwise,—had she chanced to look up at that moment, and thereby caught sight of the visage of her cousin, she must perforce have been startled at the heightened colour, and strangely-animated expression which she would have beheld there.

She reached the house-door, however, without having seen either the beautiful face of Harriet Hartwell, or the emotion which it caused in her companion.

Her footman had followed her from the carriage, and, being an old and experienced servant of the Manor House, knew that, however unnecessary the ceremony might be, from the

fact of the carriage-wheels having long ago announced his lady's arrival, it was his duty to ring the bell; and he did so with a very respectful degree of violence.

When Mrs. Hartwell was first married—that is to say, in the year 1792—which was just twenty years before the period of which I am now writing, she would probably have hastened to the door, and have opened it with her own fair hands, had she been as well aware then as she was now, that Mrs. Osterly, the lady of the Manor, stood before it. But now she knew better. She had two or three times since her marriage spent a week in the city of Exeter, where Mr. Hartwell had an aunt residing, whose husband had died many years ago, in possession of the honourable station of prebend of the cathedral. His widow, who was left with the very handsome income of four hundred a year, had carefully maintained her place in the station in which her reverend husband had left her, and therefore Mrs. Hartwell never made her a visit, without acquiring some little information respecting the manners of fashionable society.

It was probably in consequence of information gained in this manner that she now, though not perhaps without some little difficulty, sat still in her chair, till the parlour door opened, and Mrs. Osterly and Mr. Cuthbert entered. Mrs. Osterly's salutation was so perceptibly more condescending than usual, that both Mrs. Hartwell and her eldest daughter not only perceived it, but accounted to themselves for the change, by supposing that it proceeded from gratitude for the hospitality with which her cousin had been received during her absence. As to Harriet, her attention was in no degree occupied by endeavouring to explain the cause of Mrs. Osterly's increased condescension, for she saw it not. She really and truly saw nothing but Mr. Cuthbert, and the eagerness with which he walked across the room to reach her.

During a minute or two, Mrs. Osterly was occupied by placing herself commodiously in the arm-chair, drawn out for her, from the wall against which it usually stood, by the observant Mrs. Hartwell, who was aware that she never sat in any chair which had not arms to it; and having so placed herself, she very condescendingly said, "I hope my good friend Dr. Hartwell is in as good health as when I left home?"

"Not Doctor Hartwell, madam," returned the vicar's lady, smiling; "my husband has not the honour of being a doctor of divinity."

"Oh, no! No more he has; I forgot what I was talking about," said Mrs. Osterly. "However, I suppose he could be a doctor of divinity whenever he liked, if it was necessary. I have known two or three, who, when the time came, had no

difficulty at all in being made doctors. But you have not told me how he is, ma'am."

"He is quite well, I thank you, madam," returned Mrs. Hartwell; "and, if you will give me leave, I will let him know you are here."

"Pray do. I should like to—I mean, I should like to see him," replied Mrs. Osterly, graciously nodding her head.

Mrs. Hartwell rose.


"Let me go and look for papa, shall I, mamma?" said Mary, rather frightened, perhaps, at the idea of being left to entertain their grand neighbour by herself; for Harriet was already too completely occupied in listening to Mr. Cuthbert, for her to hope for any assistance from her. The entrance of Mr. Hartwell, however, rendered the absence of either mother or daughter unnecessary, and his reception by the lady of the manor was so greatly less stiff and stately than any he had ever experienced from her before, that he, too, being driven to seek a cause for it, supposed that it must proceed from gratitude for the friendly manner in which her relative had been received at the Vicarage.

"I hope you return to us in good health, madam," said Mr. Hartwell, with a respectful bow.

"Yes, my good Doctor, I am as well as usual; a little stiff sometimes, and a little gouty at others, but by no means sorry to get back to my old Manor House again, and to my good neighbours at the Vicarage also. I shall be sorry when you leave us, Dr. Hartwell, though, of course, I shall be glad at the same time of anything that may be advantageous to you."

"You are very kind, my dear lady," said the puzzled vicar; "and I surely can wish for nothing better than to remain where I am, so kindly treated as I am here. But let me wish you joy of the arrival of your relative, Mr. Cuthbert; I assure you, madam, it has been a great pleasure to me to see my old college friend looking so young, and so well. It is really difficult to believe that so many years have passed over us, since we parted. It seems that he is wonderfully little altered."

"Mr. Cuthbert is by no means an old man, sir. He is several years my junior," replied Mrs. Osterly.

And then, having turned her head towards the place where he stood talking to Harriet, who had not resumed her seat since their entrance, she added, "But I must say, he does look particularly young and handsome just now. The truth is, that my Cousin Cuthbert is a very handsome man, Mr. Hartwell, and of a very fine  ture; and age almost always seems to have a sort of respect for such persons. Your young daughter, too, has her full share of comeliness, sir. I can't help thinking that

she is greatly improved since I saw her last. I don't remember ever observing before that she had such remarkably fine eyes."

Mr. Hartwell smiled as a parent is apt to smile upon hearing such words, and replied in a way which is also by no means uncommon upon such occasions, saying, "You are very kind to say so, my dear lady, but I can assure you that she is, to say the least of it, quite as good as she is pretty."

"I am glad to hear it, Dr. Hartwell. The daughters of our distinguished divines are especially called upon so to conduct themselves, as not to bring discredit upon the station of their fathers; and the higher that station is, the more it behoves them to be well behaved in all ways," replied the old lady, nodding her head with a very mysterious air of intelligence.

The good vicar again looked puzzled; but to say the truth, his long acquaintance with his respected neighbour had so thoroughly taught him to know that her pompous conversation never did, and never could, contain any meaning worth looking for, if it chanced, as in the present instance, that the said meaning did not lie upon the surface, that he gave himself no trouble to understand her now. The question, "Why does she call me doctor?" certainly did suggest itself, but it was solved by his supposing that she did it to sooth her own feelings, probably awakened to his lamentable want of dignity, by her having, during her late absence, been in the society of clergymen holding the academic rank which she now thought proper to bestow on him. So he neither inquired her meaning nor corrected her mistake, but turning to Mr. Cuthbert, said—

"It is very kind of you, my dear sir, to come and look in upon us this morning, for I assure you our breakfast-table was not only less cheerful this morning than when it was favoured by your presence, but less decorated also, for the pretty shower of roses that Miss Harriet used to sprinkle upon it has ceased altogether."

Had good Mrs. Hartwell spoken to her husband concerning Mr. Cuthbert's attentions to Harriet, and of the effect which they had appeared to produce upon her, in the same unreserved manner she had done to her friend Miss Margaret Johnson, the above speech would never have been made by the vicar. But the truth was, that she was a little bit afraid of her husband's laughing at her, as he had sometimes done before, when she had hinted to him that she did think their little Harry was the most beautiful girl she had ever seen; and the consequence of her reserve was, that the father had no more idea of the sort of flirtation which the keener eye of the mother had discerned, than he had of the projects of the man in the moon.

Neither did he at all understand, or in any way particularly observe, that his idle words had dyed the cheeks of his young

daughter with a brighter tint than any of the roses which she had lately scattered on his breakfast table could boast. But the mother understood it only too well, and knit her brows ; and Mary understood, too, which caused her cheeks almost to rival those of her sister, and both the mother and Mary felt more nearly angry with the vicar of Penmorris at that moment, than they had either of them ever done before in the whole course of their lives.

But this mattered little, for the good man, being as unconscious of their anger as of its cause, was in no ways pained thereby, but proceeded to talk to his condescending old acquaintance with the pleasant feeling which is always inspired, I think, in the breast of a parent, upon perceiving that the kindly feeling of old friends towards himself is permitted to descend, like a sort of heir-loom, to his children.

What the feelings of Mr. Cuthbert might be upon hearing this very broad allusion to the tender sentiments which he was quite aware he had inspired in the breast of the lovely Harriet, it might not be so easy to explain ; for he was not one of those who wore his heart upon his sleeve, or upon his face either ; and having given one short, one very short, glance at the agitated features of his intended bride, he effectually turned all eyes away from her, by suddenly exclaiming, as he looked through the open window, " Good gracious, Miss Harriet ! how those honeysuckles have opened since yesterday ! "

Mary screwed up her pretty red lips in a look of very quizzical solemnity, but said nothing, though if she had been quite as innocently ignorant of what was going on as her good father, she might have been likely enough to tell the old gentleman he was mistaken, for that the night had been cold, and the blossoms quite immovable.

But she saw that her darling Harry was greatly relieved and comforted, by having an object outside the room upon which she was invited to fix her eyes ; and she would not have endangered the restored tranquillity of that dear blushing face, if, by doing so, she could have prevented Mr. Cuthbert from offending against common sense for the rest of his life. Neither, to say truth, did she at this time take any of Mr. Cuthbert's absurdities much to heart. That she suspected him of being a very foolish fond old man is most certain ; but, nevertheless, she doubted his being either foolish or fond enough to dream of such an absurdity as asking Harriet to be his wife ; and as to there being any danger that Harriet would accept him if he did, she no more suspected its existence than she did that there was any risk of her marrying him herself. And so she behaved very discreetly and well, though a little bit inclined to laugh

at her pretty sister, about her blushing so vehemently because it was found out that she had gathered some flowers on purpose to please the old gentleman at breakfast-time.

Mrs. Osterly saw nothing at all in what was going on, save the condescending good nature and familiarity of her cousin's manners towards the vicar and his family ; but she was neither surprised, nor greatly displeased by it, attributing it, as she did, entirely to the accident of his having become acquainted with the intentions of the government in favour of the vicar of Penmorris.

She might think, perhaps, that he carried it a little too far, when she saw him lean out of the parlour window, side by side with the vicar's rustic daughter ; and, as it seemed to her, whisper something almost in her ear. She had, however, during their conversation of the evening before, conceived a very exalted idea of her cousin's principles and intellect, and also of the confidential terms on which it was evident he must be living with the highest officers of the state, without which it was impossible he could have known, what it was very evident he did know.

So that, upon the whole, she felt more inclined to imitate his condescending manners to the family of the future bishop, than to quarrel with them ; and accordingly, her invitation for them all to come and dine at the Manor House on the morrow, was delivered with less appearance of thinking that she was performing an act of charity than usual.

And far different, also, was the manner in which one at least of the invited guests listened to the invitation. From the hour when Mr. Cuthbert left the Vicarage, to that in which he returned to it, the hope, the chance, the possibility that they might be invited to dine at the Manor House, while he remained its inmate, had occupied the mind of the beautiful Harriet to a degree which the beautiful young ladies of these days, whose rustic residences, however distant from the metropolis, are sure to be visited from time to time by some of their constantly flitting and flying fellow-creatures, may find it difficult to comprehend.

Were I to state positively that Harriet Hartwell, not quite nineteen, was in love with Mr. Cuthbert, very nearly sixty, I should assuredly be guilty of a certain degree of exaggeration ; for the passion of love, properly so called, is scarcely possible under such circumstances. But nevertheless it is an undeniable fact, that Harriet Hartwell exhibited many symptoms of a state of mind which is very often mistaken for it.

He had roused and gratified her vanity greatly, more than it had been ever roused or gratified before ; and vanity is itself

a passion, and one too which affords great pleasure when gratified, and excites great interest, and a very agreeable sort of flutter in the spirits while it is in action.

And, moreover, Harriet very sincerely admired the polished manners and graceful demeanour of Mr. Cuthbert, independently of the sort of involuntary and insidious feeling of partiality which his obvious admiration of herself inspired, so that altogether she might most truly be said to be infatuated by him; and one consequence of this was, that instead of hearing Mrs. Osterly's invitation with the half glad and half sorry feeling, which used to be created by consciousness of the honour, and fear of the tedium of the visit, she now welcomed it with a tremor of delight that sparkled in her eye and glowed upon her cheek.

Mary looked at her almost unconsciously, the moment after the invitation; and knew the expression of her fair face much too well, not to be aware that she was greatly delighted, and she was vexed, but the moment after felt more vexed still, at having been so very ill-natured.

The business upon which Mrs. Osterly had condescended to come, having been achieved, the visit was soon brought to a conclusion; and after listening in silence to a few civil words from Mrs. Hartwell, upon the beautiful verdure of the park this year, she said, in a tone rather louder than usual, "Cousin Cuthbert, let me trouble you for your arm."

It was a sore trial of the old lady's temper, to find this appeal neither attended to, nor even heard; but the fact is, that Mr. Cuthbert had ventured to say to Harriet, in a tone audible only to herself, "Do you think, Miss Harriet, that I shall like to find myself once more seated beside you at table?"

And this tender appeal had so agitated the inexperienced Harriet, that her lover, for such Mr. Cuthbert felt himself to be a thousand times more passionately than ever, had no longer eyes, ears, or understanding for anything but the contemplation of the beautiful embarrassment into which his words had thrown her.

Mrs. Osterly looked at them both with a very fierce stare, in which, however, there was more of astonishment than anger, for no suspicion, in the very slightest degree, approaching the truth, appeared to be within reach of her imagination. That she should have spoken, however, without being attended to, was offence enough to shake her equanimity, and she frowned awfully till she remembered it was not impossible that her respected cousin might really be deaf; and then she almost smiled as she said, "People may talk of your young looks, Cousin Cuthbert, as much as they like, but I am younger than you in the article of hearing, I can tell you that." And

saying these words, she accepted the offered arm of the bishop 'in posse,' and permitted him to draw her up from her seat.

But, apparently, not even this very visible and decided movement of her important person would have succeeded in arousing the wholly captivated Mr. Cuthbert from the enchantment which had enthralled him, if Mary, who felt dreadfully terrified at the idea of what Mrs. Osterly might say or do if she saw the sort of way in which Mr. Cuthbert was looking at Harriet, who still stood before him very visibly agitated, but with her eyes fixed upon the ground, had not hastily approached them, and touching the arm of her sister, said aloud, "Harry, Mrs. Osterly is going!"

Harriet started fully as much as if a pistol had been discharged close to her ear, and then retreated from the place where she stood, with a hurried movement, which showed plainly enough that she did not think it prudent to pursue the conversation in which she had been engaged.

Mr. Cuthbert looked round when the gentle voice of Mary made itself heard close beside him; but it was quite evident, from the pleasant, smiling look which he bestowed upon her, that he in no degree shared the embarrassment which seemed to overwhelm his beautiful companion.

In fact, single gentlemen of fifty-seven, and rather more, when possessed of an unincumbered estate of fifteen thousand a year, if neither placemen nor courtiers, are, generally speaking, too thoroughly conscious of their independence to stand much in awe of anybody.

Mr. Cuthbert knew that his old cousin must leave her handsome estate and fine old Manor House to somebody; and really thought that the best thing she could do would be, to leave it to him—especially if he should ever happen to have more sons than one—nevertheless, he felt not in the least degree disposed to sacrifice one instant of the gratification which his new-born love was procuring him, in order to propitiate the old lady's favour.

He felt, indeed, that there would be a pleasant sort of secondary triumph in mystifying his ancient relative into the persuasion, that the marriage he was about to make was such as could not with reason and propriety be objected to by any one. But he really cared not very much whether he succeeded in this or not.

That Harriet Hartwell should, as soon as possible, become his wife, was a resolution not only firmly taken, but one which sufficed to occupy his mind too completely to render it possible for him to pay much attention to anything else. He so far yielded, however, to the hint conveyed by the words of Mary, as to prepare himself for taking leave, the principal part of

which ceremony consisted in shaking hands with Harriet ; and this lasted so long, that Mrs. Osterly had left the room before it was concluded, so he had only time to bow, smile, and nod to the rest of the family, before he had to hasten after her, in order to proffer his arm to assist her in stepping into her carriage.

CHAPTER VII.

"My dinners and suppers have been reported favourably at the Manor House, I am very sure," said Mrs. Hartwell, watching the carriage as it drove away. "I never, during all the years we have known her, saw the old lady so gracious as she was to-day."

"It is very true," said the vicar, looking pleased ; "and it shows a very good and amiable feeling, I think. After all, you know, our style of visiting at the Manor House was not likely to lead to any great degree of intimacy, and, for anything I know, it may have been partly our own faults. Perhaps we may have been too respectful—that is to say, too shy in our manner, to encourage any progress towards intimacy. But this visit of Cuthbert's seems to have thawed the ice between us at once."

Mrs. Hartwell did not immediately reply.

"What are you thinking about, my dear ?" said the vicar. Mrs. Hartwell looked into his face, as much as to say, "Can't you guess ?" But the vicar returned the look with an innocent unconsciousness that made his wife quite involuntarily shake her head.

"What are you thinking of, Mary ?" reiterated the vicar, laying a hand on each of his wife's shoulders, and looking at her fixedly ; with a smile that seemed to preface a little gentle quizzing. "I will bet sixpence that you fancy Mrs. Osterly's opinion of us, and our goings on, has been greatly exalted by Mr. Cuthbert's reports of your soups and ragouts—come ! confess the truth at once. Don't you think so ?"

"It was not that which I was thinking of, Henry, when you challenged me to tell my thoughts," replied Mrs. Hartwell. "But nevertheless," she added, "I do think that he has been probably giving a favourable account of his reception here, and that the old lady may be inclined to be more condescending to us in consequence of it ; but it was not that I was thinking about."

"What was it, then ? Why do you make such a mystery about it, my dear ?"

Mrs. Hartwell looked round the room. "Where is Harriet?" said she.

"Gone up-stairs, I suppose," said Mary. "She left the room the moment they were gone."

"I know what you were thinking of, now," said Mr. Hartwell. "I observed it as well as you. Poor Harriet's awkward shyness, I mean. She positively could not muster courage to sit down in the old lady's presence, the whole time she stayed. Poor dear child! I really hope she will get the better of this sort of weakness as she grows up; for though she is not likely, certainly, to find herself very often in the company of a lady of Mrs. Osterly's station, it is desirable that she should not positively suffer, poor dear, when it does happen. You were thinking of Harriet, were you not?"

Mrs. Hartwell again paused for a moment, and then answered, "Yes, I was."

"Well, dear wife, you must talk to her about it; and make her feel that it is a folly. I don't know anything else we can do."

And, so saying, he left the room, in order to change his coat, and resume his garden labours, which the arrival of the visitors had interrupted, leaving his wife and eldest daughter tête-à-tête.

"Yes, mamma, you were thinking of Harriet; but not in the way that my dear blind papa supposes," said Mary.

"True, Mary! quite true!" replied her mother. "And perhaps you blame me for the sort of subterfuge which sent him, so contentedly out of the room, without making any further inquiries as to the nature of my thoughts?"

"Blame you, dearest mother! No, indeed! Neither should I venture to blame you, I am very sure, had I suspected your real thoughts were more easy to explain than I now believe them to be," returned Mary. "But as it is," she continued, "I do not think you could have acted more wisely than you have done. Harriet's manner is too strange, too unaccountable, to make it right or wise to talk about it to papa, till you are able to understand it a little better yourself."

"Exactly so, my dear Mary," replied her mother. "I never was so completely puzzled in my life. If it were possible—but you know as well as I do that it is not possible—but if it were possible, I really should believe that she had fallen in love with this old man. Was not her manner of looking at him, and listening to him to-day, exactly like it?"

"Upon my word, mamma, I have so little experience in such matters," replied Mary, laughing and colouring, "that I can give you but very little help in reading the riddle. All I can say is, that you can't be more puzzled than I am."

"But do you think it possible, Mary, that she can really fancy herself in love with Mr. Cuthbert?" said Mrs. Hartwell, gravely.

"It is absolutely impossible, mamma, for me to answer the question, though it seems a very direct one; for I am quite sure that if I said Yes, or if I said No, I should change my opinion before the sound of either could reach your ears," replied Mary.

"I perfectly understand you," returned her mother. "You do not know what to think, nor do I either; and yet I suspect, too, that you must have better opportunities than I have, Mary, of discovering the truth. Does she never talk to you about him?"

"Oh yes, mamma, very often," said Mary, looking doleful, and shaking her head as if her opportunities of this sort had been more frequent than edifying.

"Then surely, my dear, you must have some notion of her real feelings. Does she speak of him with anything like tenderness?"

"On the contrary, mamma," returned the daughter, laughing—"nothing can be less tender than the tone of her conversation when Mr. Cuthbert is the theme; for she does nothing but scold me, and very seriously and heartily too, because she says I do nothing but laugh at him."

"But yet I think that you must have been able to discover, in some degree, what her own feelings towards him were while she was reproving yours," said Mrs. Hartwell.

"To a certain point I have, mamma, and I must be dull indeed if I had not; for she ceases not to express in the very strongest terms her admiration of all he does, and all he says; and so did I, you know, when you took me to Exeter to see John Kemble play King Richard. But I was not in love with him, mamma," replied Mary.

"Very well," returned her mother; "now then just take your feelings of the great actor, and his great talents as your criterion, and tell me sincerely if you think Harriet's feelings for this fine fashionable old gentleman are exactly of the same kind?"

"Do I think Harriet's feelings for Mr. Cuthbert are of the same kind as mine for Mr. John Kemble?" repeated Mary, slowly and musingly. "No, mamma; I do not."

"Can you tell me in what you think the difference chiefly consists?" demanded Mrs. Hartwell.

"Yes, mother, I think I can," was the prompt reply; "Mr. John Kemble never did or said anything which could lead me to suppose that he admired me more than any person he had ever seen in his whole life before."

"I understand you, Mary," replied her mother, in a tone that had a touch of vexation in it, "and therein, I suppose, lies the whole mystery, though we neither of us quite like to say so. It is, then, gratified vanity, and nothing else, that has led our poor little Harry to make such a goose of herself. This idea wounds me more than I can tell you. I thought her above such folly!"

"Do not look so vexed about it, dearest mother!" said Mary, cheerfully; "this great gentleman and his fine speeches will soon take themselves off, you may depend upon it, and then Harry will be our own again."

"And suppose the great gentleman were to ask Harry to be a great lady? Suppose Mr. Cuthbert were to ask our dear girl to marry him? What do you think would happen then, Mary?"

A vivid blush mounted to the very temples of Mary Hartwell as her mother spoke, and her beautiful teeth set themselves firmly together, giving to the red lips that rigidly closed over them, an expression of sternness which probably they had never worn before. She said nothing, but looked gravely in her mother's face, and shook her head reproachfully.

"You think me a monster of a mother, Mary, for asking the question?" said Mrs. Hartwell.

"I think that if you ask it in earnest, mamma, you do my poor dear sister great injustice," replied Mary.

"I rejoice to hear you say so, dearest, and the more so because I have great faith in the knowledge which two girls brought up together, as you have been, must have of each other's real feelings. Your indignation, therefore, is very satisfactory, Mary. Yet, nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that there was something in Harriet's manner this morning which throws some little doubt upon the question. How do you interpret all the blushes and embarrassment which the looks and words of this venerable Strephon produced upon her to-day?"

"You cannot expect that I should be able to interpret them very clearly, mamma," replied Mary, "because I have never myself been placed in any situation at all like hers; for not only had she to sustain all the very openly-displayed admiration of Mr. Cuthbert, but the possible remarks of our tremendous Mrs. Osterly upon it. I am quite sure that if the old lady had the slightest notion of the fine things her grand cousin says to Harriet, she would be furious! But, oh! mamma, there is a wide, wide difference between blushing, and trembling, as Harriet did to-day, and blushing and trembling because she thought she would be willing to become the wife of the man by whose side she was standing. Oh! no, no, no! our little Harry" had no such preposterous, no such unnatural thoughts in her

head, though she did let the aged gentleman whisper in her ear, as she looked out of the window. As far as that goes, I think I can answer for her."

The earnestness with which Mary uttered this brought a tear into her eye. And how came she to know so well what might be felt by a young girl, when standing beside one whose wife she would willingly be? Had she ever found her gay young self in such a position?

Her mother looked at her earnestly for a moment, but the look expressed more surprise than suspicion, and she replied, with a well-pleased smile, "I believe you are right, Mary. There is a great deal of difference between listening with complacency to an old gentleman's flattery and making up one's mind to marry him. So I will try not to torment myself any more about this venerable Adonis; he will, doubtless, soon take his departure, and then we may all laugh together, perhaps, at the fuss we have made about him. But I must go and tell Jenny that we dine out to-morrow, which piece of intelligence will save the lives of a pair of barn-door fowls for one day. Your best muslin gowns are both in nice order, I think—are they not? They only want the lace round the neck and sleeves, to be ready for to-morrow?"

"Yes, mamma, they are quite ready. Harriet wanted to put on hers one day when Mr. Cuthbert was here—but I begged and prayed, and then, dear creature, she gave it up. Shall we walk, mamma, or go in the car?" said Mary.

"Why, for the sake of your thin shoes I think we will go in the car, and come home in it too, the morning showers we have had so constantly are better for the garden than for the lane."

During the remainder of that day, Mary saw much less of her sister than usual; for, as the Vicarage House was large, and the vicar's family small, the young ladies were indulged by having separate rooms allotted to them, which is an indulgence, let the sisters so separated love each other never so dearly, and for this obvious reason, that such separation has no tendency to keep them apart when they mutually desire to be together, only affording the comfort of possible solitude when it is wished for.

And it seemed that upon this occasion it was wished for, by Harriet; for not only did she omit making her usual visit to Mary's room immediately after dinner, which room, being the largest, was the one in which they usually sat together for the enjoyment of their sisterly tête-à-têtes, but when the elder, having vainly awaited the arrival of the younger till it was time to take their usual afternoon walk, attempted to enter her chamber, she found the door bolted.

"Who is that?" inquired Harriet's voice from within.

"Mary," was the reply.

"Stay one half moment, and I will come to you," was the rejoinder; and in less than a whole one the door was opened, and Harriet stood before her sister with all her natural curls violently straightened by the application of water, and the whole appearance of her beautiful head completely and most strangely altered.

"What in the world have you been doing to yourself, Harriet? Had I seen you elsewhere I really doubt if I should have known you," said Mary.

"Nonsense!" returned Harriet, looking a good deal vexed and annoyed by the interruption. "How is it possible that combing one's hair out of curl can produce any such terrible effect."

"But what did you do it for, my dear love?" demanded Mary, taking hold of some of the dripping ringlets, and twisting them round her finger, in the hope of restoring them to their natural state. "I cannot bear to see you look so unlike yourself, dearest!" she added, rather mournfully; "I do not like it at all!"

"What a fuss you make about nothing, Mary!" said the fair experimentalist, rather indignantly. "Every body in Exeter is wearing their hair in bands now, and why should not I try how it suits me as well as the rest?"

"And who told you, my dear, that everybody in Exeter were making such frights of themselves? Whoever told me so, I am sure I would not believe them; for, from what I have seen, myself of the Exeter ladies, they are a great deal too elegant and too fashionable to do anything so ridiculous; and I tell you what, Harriet," continued the elder sister, looking very wickedly suspicious, "I am quite sure that no woman in the world could make such a terrible blunder about dress, and therefore I strongly suspect it was a gentleman. Come now, Harriet, tell me truly and honestly; is it not Mr. Cuthbert who has been filing your head with all this nonsense?"

Harriet's first answer to this insinuation was a look powerfully expressive of contempt and scorn, which was received by poor Mary with great good humour, for her only rejoinder was a merry laugh!

"I cannot but think, Mary, that you are too old to indulge in such incessant laughter, with reason or without it," said Harriet, with a curl of her beautiful lip, which expressed a good deal of contempt. "If you will look at this, you will learn to understand, perhaps, that I do not say things quite so lightly as some other people do."

And as she spoke, she drew forth from the drawer of the

dressing-table, a pocket-book, compiled for the use of the passing year, under the frontispiece of which was inscribed these words—"The newest fashions of head-dresses for the year 1812."

Mary glanced at the engraving with a laughing eye, and said, "But how does this prove, Harriet, that all the fashionable ladies in Exeter have consented to disfigure themselves in this style?"

"I know that this very new and very elegant fashion is the fashion, because this book says so; and I know that the ladies of Exeter are beginning to follow it, because Annie Prescott told me so," replied her sister, gravely.

"Well, Harry, a printed book, and Annie Prescott together, are too much to be resisted—that I confess; but, nevertheless, if you could put off following the ladies of Exeter till after we have dined at the Manor House, I should be very glad; because I am quite sure that the old lady would begin talking about it, and saying something about country lasses growing too fine, as she did last year, when mamma brought us from Falmouth those pretty coal-scuttle bonnets; and if I were you, I should not like to be talked to in that way before a stranger."

"Like it? No, Mary, I certainly should not like it; and it may be as well, as you say, to avoid running the risk; for, of course, it is extremely disagreeable to have that sour-looking little Miss Shrimley's sharp eyes fixed upon one. So I suppose I must wear my tiresome old-fashioned curls as usual."

"Tiresome old-fashioned curls!" cried Mary, with a loving glance at the twisting tendrils, which had already begun to recover their liberty. "I wonder how much any one of the fashionable ladies, even in London itself, would give to have the like!"

Harriet gave her a kiss, but shook her head very gravely afterwards, saying, in a tone that had more of sorrow than of anger—"Ah! my poor Mary! I greatly fear you were born to die a rustic, or you never would speak of fashion so contemptuously as you do!"

"A rustic I was born," replied Mary—"and a rustic, perhaps, I hope to die.—But in this particular case, Harry, I think I show a deeper feeling upon the subject of dress than you do. How you look with your old-fashioned curls, as you call them, I know; but how you might look without them, I know not."

And then, being rather a good Shaksperean scholar, she added, with emphasis—"And this makes me rather bear the looks (and the locks) you have, than change for others that I know not of."

"Well, Mary, don't tease me any more about it, and I will

go on with my poor old-fashioned curls," said Harriet, shaking her head as if it had been a mop, an operation which speedily made all the dark silken tresses recover their natural position, notwithstanding the moisture which still hung upon them. And then such a conversation followed, about frocks, and lace, and bows, as might naturally be expected between two pretty sisters under twenty, who were called upon to appear in gay attire so very seldom as were the fair daughters of the vicar of Penmorris.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE car conveyed the vicarage party to the Manor House, in very nice condition as to ringlets and bows, exactly as the great clock over the stables struck the last quarter before four.

Mrs. Osterly, according to her invariable custom upon all such occasions, was sitting in her "great drawing-room," which, being a saloon large enough to accommodate at least a hundred guests with perfect convenience, looked considerably more splendid than comfortable, with Mrs. Osterly in one chair, Miss Shrifflly in another, and Mr. Cuthbert standing—not on the rug, for there was no such thing, but in the front of the fire between them.

That there was fire in the large bright grate, though May had reached its close, was a proof that in one point, at least, Mrs. Osterly was before the age in which she lived. In most things she was decidedly behind it; but a tolerably strong affection for creature comforts had long ago taught her, that the custom of lighting fires on Michaelmas-day, and putting them out on Lady-day, was one more rational in the breach than the observance. So there was a fire, and it really seemed to smile a more cordial welcome upon the guests, as they walked up the long, long room, than even the stately bow of the condescending Lady of the Manor.

Harriet, as well as the rest of her family, had walked up that great long room very often before, but the distance had never appeared so awfully great to her. Perhaps the reason was, that she had never before felt conscious that a most scrutinizing pair of eyes were watching every step she took, and the fear that she might perform this long approach awkwardly almost deprived her of the power of making it at all.

Mrs. Osterly was certainly not insensible to the opening of the door, or the entrance of her guests; but, as it must be quite useless to say anything to them from so great a distance,

she waited patiently, like a sensible woman, till they were close to her chair, and then she said—

“Good day, Mrs. Hartwell. Sit down in that chair, if you please. Yes, that one. How do you do, Miss Mary? And how do you do, Miss Harriet? Your servant, Doctor, I am glad to see you here again. You may sit down in those two chairs, young ladies, if you please. Miss Shrifflly, move your place, and talk to them. Come here, Doctor, and sit down by me. It pleases me to see you look so well, Dr. Hartwell. Whenever the time comes for your leaving this place, I think your looks will do credit to it.”

“Indeed, madam,” replied the vicar, “I feel so perfectly well here, that I have no wish whatever to change my abode.”

“Ay, ay, that is all as it should be,” said the old lady, nodding her head significantly; “all very right and proper. Everybody ought to be contented where they are; and when the time comes for a change, they should not be above confessing that they are more contented still.”

Mr. Hartwell again looked, and felt puzzled; but he knew that Mrs. Osterly was a good deal in the habit of uttering moral axioms for the benefit of those within hearing, and it occurred to him that he had probably manifested, either a too evident partiality to his own pretty Vicarage, or a too vainglorious feeling of contentment at the progress of the parish-school, and that her words were intended to check either one or both of these vanities.

Mr. Cuthbert, meanwhile, glided behind the chairs in which the sisters had obediently placed themselves, and began conversing with them both in the most graceful manner imaginable. Fortunately, however, Miss Shrifflly, in like obedience to the orders she had received, had approached her chair on the side next Mary, and no sooner had she replaced herself in it, than Mr. Cuthbert took possession of another, which he deposited beside Harriet, and, having seated himself therein, commenced the operations which he fully intended should continue during the remainder of the day; the which operations consisted in looking at her with the most undisguised admiration, and in addressing his conversation to her in the most marked style of devoted attention.

While he was at the Vicarage, he had certainly made her fully conscious that he greatly preferred her society to that of any other member of the family, but this had been done without anything approaching the open display of devotion which he now unscrupulously manifested. For the first few minutes of his addressing her in this style, she felt ready to sink into the earth, from a feeling of positive terror, lest Mrs. Osterly should observe his conduct, and comment upon it.

The poor frightened beauty knew perfectly well, that if it chanced to come into the old lady's head that she was endeavouring to attract the attention she received, she would not scruple to reprove her openly, either for unpardonable arrogance or offensive levity. But, by degrees, Mr. Cuthbert's fearless demeanour inspired first a little courage, then a good deal, and then the still more comfortable sensation of indifference; so that Harriet, too, began to feel that she was going to enjoy herself more than she had ever expected to do in that house.

"What am I a raid of?" she asked herself. "What can the cross old woman do to me? If she says anything rude, Mr. Cuthbert will be sure to say something kind, and which do I care for most?"

At what moment of that decisive day it was that Harriet first conceived the idea of Mr. Cuthbert's being really and seriously in love with her, I will not attempt to say, but certain it is, that the day did not close without her feeling the conviction that this was the case.

Nor must she be deemed presumptuous for coming to this conclusion so readily; for on such occasions, there is generally a sympathy between the parties that forestalls both declaration and acceptance; and Mr. Cuthbert, having given what he thought sufficient consideration to the subject, had come to the conclusion that nothing whatever could be gained by delaying his declaration.

He therefore, deliberately and designedly, so comported himself, as to give not only the fair girl herself the first idea of his serious intentions, but also to strengthen all the fears of her mother and sister; to surprise her father; to dismay her hostess; and to throw Miss Shriftly into a state of indignation, which she found it difficult to restrain within the bounds of civility.

Mrs. Osterly, however, was still vacillating between the degrading idea that the rustic beauty had really made a serious impression on the heart of her cousin, and the much less disagreeable suspicion that he was indulging himself a little in exciting her countrified embarrassment by his fine speeches,—when the dinner was announced.

"You must give me your arm as usual, my good Doctor!" said the old lady, waiting to be pulled out of her great chair; "and you, Cousin Cuthbert, will give your arm to Mrs. Hartwell. Shriftly, you must take care of the young ladies."

This order of march was too inevitable to be interfered with, even by so ardent a lover as Mr. Cuthbert, and he therefore submitted to it with a good grace conversing with his future mother-in-law, as they proceeded to the dining-room, with a great deal of very flattering intimacy of manner. But, having

reached the dinner-table, he took the law into his own hands. His place was, of course, according to the customs of those days, at the bottom of the table ; and, having stationed himself there, he said,—

“ I think you must sit next to my cousin, Mrs. Hartwell, and the two young ladies must sit one on each side of me.”

To this arrangement no objection could be made, and Miss Shrifflly placed herself before the plate that divided the vicar from his eldest daughter.

There was so much heavy solemnity in Mrs. Osterly's dinners, that it was very nearly impossible for any one, however high-spirited and daring, to venture upon any great conversational attempt. Mr. Cuthbert, however, did his best, and the meal, therefore, did not pass absolutely in silence. Mr. Hartwell, who was really a very conversable man, did his best also ; but that best would have been better, had he not been annoyed by the perpetual whisperings of his illustrious old acquaintance into the ear of his blushing young daughter.

He never suspected for a moment that the magnificent and aged Mr. Cuthbert was making serious love to his little, insignificant, and almost childish girl ; but he began now, for the first time, to suspect that he was paying her a profusion of compliments, which, though less likely to turn her giddy little head than if they had proceeded from younger lips, were nevertheless anything rather than a profitable amusement for an innocent and ignorant country maiden, who might very possibly listen to fine speeches, uttered in jest, with as much attention as if they were spoken in earnest.

Nor was this the good vicar's only source of annoyance ; for he plainly perceived that Mrs. Osterly was quite as observant of what was passing at the bottom of the table as himself, and that the aspect of her hard features became sterner and sterner every moment.

The sharp eye of little Miss Shrifflly, also, was generally turned in the same direction, and there was a mixture of mockery and mischief in its glance which caused him to feel very ill at ease, lest his wife should perceive it, and feel too much vexed and alarmed at the unusual position of Harriet to preserve her composure.

But, however disagreeable all this might be, it did not take the watchful mother so much by surprise as it had done him ; indeed, after a few minutes of consideration, which in her reasonable mind soon followed the first movement of vexation and alarm, Mrs. Hartwell secretly rejoiced that her suspicions were likely to be verified so speedily ; for she would not permit herself to believe that, if Mr. Cuthbert made a proposal of marriage to Harriet, there could be any real danger of her

accepting him ; and she therefore thought that the sooner the very foolish affair was brought to a conclusion, the better it would be for them all.

So she returned a very grave and anxious look from her husband by a light smile, which so encouraged the vicar, that he was enabled to enter into a long discussion with Mrs. Osterly on the subject of poor rates, and their application ; and this lasted till the regulated time of her sitting at the dinner-table had elapsed, of which she, as usual, received due notice, by the old butler placing his hand upon the back of the chair which occupied the bottom of the table, and fixing a particularly intelligent glance upon his mistress. And, as usual, the signal was immediately attended to, and his mistress rose.

The little party returned to the drawing-room in the order in which they had left it ; and then followed one whole hour of that unspeakable perfection of dullness, which can only be conceived by those who have dined at the house of a Mrs. Osterly, when there was "no party."

There was not then, as now, the relief of a cup of strong black coffee administered immediately after dinner, for the purpose, doubtless, of counteracting the somniferous effects of a long, silent repast. No ; no cheering moment was then sacred to dear coffee, and to coffee alone, its dulcet 'chasse' being taken, or refused, '*à volonté* ;' but it was contaminated and lowered, both in dignity and usefulness, by being made part and parcel of the tea-table.

But this tea-table did come at last ; and then Miss Shrifflly entered with great parade upon the most important of all her functions, contriving, for many minutes, to keep two stalwart waiting-men in obedient subjection to her commands. She seemed to enjoy this, and to linger complacently over all the little preliminary operations which preceded the distribution of her nectar.

"William ! go round and inquire whether I shall send tea or coffee !"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Stephen ! go to Mrs. Osterly and ask her if I shall mix the black and green, or make them separate !"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are you quite sure that the water boils, William ?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What is there under that cover, Stephen ? Toast, or muffin !"

"Muffin, ma'am."

"Then go to Mrs. Osterly, and tell her that there is muffin !"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What tea is this, William ? Is it some of the Falmouth tea, or did it come from Exeter ?"

"From Falmouth, ma'am" (in a whisper).

"It is excellent tea—the Falmouth tea!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I don't see the clouted cream, Stephen! Who can take coffee, I wonder, without that? Slip out this minute, Stephen; Mrs. Osterly will ask for it directly!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What biscuits are these, William? Are they Falmouth?"

"No, ma'am; made at home."

"They look a little burnt, don't they?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"They may as well be left on the table, I think, and only carry round the muffins and the bread and butter!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Turn the cock of the urn, Stephen, but don't let the water run too fast; I only want just to bathe the green tea, at first."

"Yes, ma'am."

And this went on for a great while; but, nevertheless, the tea was made at last, and then followed the ceremony of drinking it; and this, too, occupied a great deal of time. But Mr. Hartwell, and Mrs. Hartwell, and their daughter Mary, were so far used to it, that they knew at every stage of the business exactly what was to come next, and they all three behaved with the most perfect patience and propriety.

And how did Harriet and Mr. Cuthbert behave? At least, they were very unobtrusive and quiet; nobody could possibly complain that they were troublesome; for though they appeared during the whole time to be conversing, no one except themselves heard a single word that they said.

Mrs. Osterly had more than once abruptly stopped in the midst of a conversation which the praiseworthy vicar continued to carry on with her, and fixed her eyes, with a sort of fearless, unmitigated stare, upon her cousin and the young person whom he had so strangely selected as his companion for the time being; and certainly there was something in the expression of her face as she did so, which pretty nearly justified the feeling of alarm that in some degree affected Mrs. Hartwell, but which actually made poor Mary turn pale.

Nothing worse happened, however, than the having to contemplate this imperious and inquiring glance; and it is probable that the old lady was, on her side, of opinion, that whatever mischief might be going on, would be more effectually checked in a private conversation with her cousin, than by any species of reproof she could utter before company.

So when the tea was over, she ordered the card-table to be put out, and then said, rather gaily—

"Now then, Doctor, we will have one of our old battles

at whist. You may depend upon it that my Cousin Cuthbert plays, at least as well as old Mr. Soames, whom I did not invite to day because I heard that he had got a touch of the gout. Now then, Cousin Cuthbert! If you please, sir, we want your assistance at the whist-table!"

"Upon my life and honour, my dearest lady," he fearlessly replied—"I am in despair at being unable to help you—absolutely unable! I give you my word, that I could no more play a rubber of whist to-night than I could fly to the moon!"

"Cousin Cuthbert, give me leave to tell you," began the old lady, knitting her brows, and looking most alarmingly fierce—"give me leave to tell you——"

"No, no, my dearest lady," replied Mr. Cuthbert, with the gay, light accent of five-and-twenty—"no, no, I cannot give you leave to tell me anything to night. To-morrow, I have a great deal that I want to tell you, but it is too late now. But why should we not play a pool of Commerce, instead of a rubber of whist? and then the whole party can join."

It was something so very new for Mrs. Osterly, particularly in her own Manor House, to hear her will disputed, that she was positively overcome and conquered, by the mere effect of surprise. But, despite the sort of paralysis which this unwonted contradiction brought upon her, the old lady had quite judgment enough left to perceive that this rich, highly-connected, and perfectly independent cousin of hers, was not likely to reward any exertion she should make for his advantage, at this moment, with very prompt obedience; and, should it eventually prove that, notwithstanding the pretty little addition to his noble fortune which it was in her power to bestow upon him, it was his intention to act in conformity to his own will, instead of hers, it would be more agreeable for her to learn it in private than in company.

She made, therefore, a much greater effort to subdue the anger that was swelling her veins than her old acquaintance, Mr. Hartwell, gave her credit for having the power to do, and replied, "Well then, Cousin Cuthbert, let us play at Commerce!"

"Not quite so difficult to manage as I thought for," was the pleasant reflection which these words suggested to the gay Mr. Cuthbert, who immediately exerted himself, with the assistance of the delighted Miss Shrifflly, in searching for fish, and in arranging the Commerce-table. The proposition was, on the whole, a very judicious one—a fact sufficiently obvious, perhaps, to be perceptible even to the angry Mrs. Osterly herself; at any rate, she showed no further symptoms of resistance; and, till the great clock struck ten, the seven persons, then and there assembled, appeared to be as completely absorbed by the changes

and chances of this dullest of all possible games, as if the wealth and the welfare of their future lives had depended upon the success of all the cunning little arrangements which they made in the course of it.

But this feeling, though evidently very general, was not experienced with equal exclusiveness by all the party; for instance, Mr. Cuthbert never failed to take advantage of the appearance of the ace of hearts, by whispering to Harriet, very close to whom he had seated himself, something signifying that she ought to take possession of it.

Neither could Mrs. Hartwell completely give herself to the game, or quite succeed in persuading herself that the blushes and smiles with which her pretty Harry continued to listen to the venerable Adonis at her side, had nothing to do with any such feeling as would be necessary to make her accept him as her husband, in case he should play the fool so preposterously as to offer himself.

When the clock struck ten, the punctual butler entered, and very solemnly announced the fact, that Mr. Hartwell's car was at the door.

This brought all the honours and pleasures of the day to an abrupt conclusion; for Mrs. Osterly immediately said, in a voice too authoritative to be resisted, even by Mr. Cuthbert himself—"Then the person who has the most lives left must take the pool, and if there are two, or more, with the same number, it must be divided between them."

There was one player, however, who was greatly superior to all the others both in skill and watchfulness. This was Miss Shrifflly, and she was rewarded for it as she deserved to be; she, only, had two lives remaining, and to her the seven shillings, contained in the delicate old china saucer, were consigned.

No transaction of equal importance was ever despatched more promptly, for Mrs. Osterly was fatigued both in body and mind; and her reiterated "Good night," "good night," "good night!" was uttered in a tone which left not the slightest inclination in any of the Vicarage party to linger, as they returned the valedictory salutation. The

"At once good night!"

of Lady Macbeth was an invitation to stay all night when compared with it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Hartwell family were considerably more silent than usual, as they returned home.

The servant always acted as coachman, the vicar and his lady usually sitting on one side of the car, and their two daughters on the other; but on this occasion neither the old couple nor the young one appeared to be at all in a conversable humour.

Neither did the two young ladies, on ascending the stairs, move on together to the bedroom of the eldest, as was their usual habit on returning from an excursion; but pausing, as if by mutual consent, at the top, they exchanged a friendly "Good night," and parted.

Had Harriet's fond mother been aware how sleeplessly her pretty daughter's night was passed, she would have been very uneasy concerning her health, for, notwithstanding all her anxiety and all her suspicions about Mr. Cuthbert's fine speeches, she would have found it difficult to believe that it was his lovemaking, and the hopes and uncertainties to which it had left her a prey, which had made this young creature, whose years exactly numbered one-third of his, so very wakeful.

But so it was.

Mr. Cuthbert had, indeed, said to her abundance of very tender things; and very plainly insinuated that it was impossible his heart should ever recover from the impression which she had made upon it; but he had not asked her if she would consent to become Mrs. Cuthbert, and the mistress of all the halls, parks, abbeys, and houses of which he stood possessed.

Harriet's sleeplessness, however, did not wholly proceed from any doubts which might still rest upon her mind, respecting his intentions concerning her, a good deal of it being produced by the uncertainty of her own intentions concerning him. For, after all, little Harry was a good-hearted little girl; and, though certainly somewhat vain, and it may be somewhat ambitious too, was far from being capable of wishing to marry a man whom she did not love, or, at any rate, whom she did not fancy she loved; and on this point there were moments when she did not feel quite certain as to the real state of her own young heart.

The conclusion to which her thoughts generally brought themselves, when debating this point with herself, was this, "I am quite sure, at least, that if I am not in love with Mr. Cuthbert, I never shall be in love with anybody else." And not unfrequently these thoughts went on, reasoning, very youthfully, upon the subject of love in general; and coming at last

to the conclusion, that it was not at all likely that everybody in the whole world was certain to fall in love.

"On the contrary," thought she, as she settled herself deliberately upon her pillow, determined to think no more about it, but to go to sleep—"on the contrary, I am pretty certain that I am not one of the falling-in-love people—that is, such falling in love as one reads of in books—like Juliet, for instance, in the play—I am quite sure that I should never swallow poison, nor stab myself either, for any such nonsense."

And at last she did go to sleep; and then she dreamed that Mr. William Nettletop, the son of the family apothecary, and Mr. George Saunders, the son of an attorney in the neighbourhood, with both of whom she had danced at the Falmouth ball (the only ball at which she had ever appeared), rode over to the Vicarage together, and both made her an offer of marriage, and that Mr. Cuthbert stood by all the time; and when they had finished saying all that they had got to say, he offered himself too, telling her that if she liked either of the young men better, she ought not to marry him; but if she liked him best, she ought not to marry either of them.

Doubtless this sleep, late as it was, did her good; and it might be that she found the doctrine preached to her in her dream very convincing and satisfactory; but, nevertheless, she looked very pale at breakfast, so pale, indeed, that her mother changed her purpose, which was, to have spoken to her rather seriously about listening with so much marked pleasure to everything that Mr. Cuthbert said to her; but now she thought that she would put it off, excusing herself to Mary, who had greatly approved of her intention, by saying that she could not bear to vex her, when she looked so unwell; and, moreover, that it was very unlikely Mr. Cuthbert would stay in the country much longer.

Harriet had, after breakfast, betaken herself to her own room, leaving her mother and Mary 'tête-à-tête' in the common sitting-room, when Mr. Hartwell, who, as usual, had been busily at work in his garden, entered to them with an open letter in his hand, and a countenance which expressed a very unusual degree of agitation.

"What is the matter, Henry?" exclaimed his wife, in an accent of alarm. "That letter brings bad news of some sort."

"I suspect there has been great blindness among us, if it brings any news at all," he replied. "Mary," turning to his daughter, "I see no reason for keeping this letter a secret from you, though I do not wish your sister to know anything about it; so remember, my dear, I show it to you in confidence. It is really too silly, and I positively feel ashamed of my old

acquaintance. This letter contains an offer of marriage from Mr. Cuthbert, to Harriet!"

Mrs. Hartwell and her daughter Mary exchanged a glance of intelligence.

"That look," said the vicar, "if I understand it aright, means that my news is no news to either of you; so I have been the only one of the party too dull to perceive what has been going on! Is it not so?"

"I think it very likely that the principal person concerned is as ignorant of Mr. Cuthbert's intentions as you have been," replied Mrs. Hartwell; "and though Mary and I have certainly perceived, and commented upon, his obvious admiration, I doubt if we either of us were prepared for this declaration."

"You do not, then, mean to mention it to Harriet at all, papa?" said Mary.

"Why, no, Mary," he replied. "I think it is quite as well not to do it. But you look as if you thought otherwise."

"Indeed, papa, I feel no inclination to combat your opinion on the subject. My only possible reason for wishing that Harriet should be made acquainted with Mr. Cuthbert's proposal is, that I might have the satisfaction of hearing her refuse it."

"Out upon you, Mary!" said her father, with a reproachful glance, "I did not suspect you of so much vain femality, as I believe Captain Mervin would call it."

Mary said nothing in reply, but looked at her mother.

"It is not femality, but sisterality," said Mrs. Hartwell. "Mary and I were discussing this subject the other day, and she expressed her conviction that Harriet would refuse him, if he did offer, rather more strongly than I did—and she only wishes to prove that she judged her sister rightly."

"Surely, you did not feel any doubt, yourself, on the subject, did you?" said Mr. Hartwell, looking at his wife with a sort of incredulous smile. "But all this is very idle talk," he added; "and I must answer the letter, for the man waits. There are pens, ink, and paper, on that table of yours, Mary, are there not?"

"Yes, my dear," replied his wife. "There are all things necessary for writing on my table."

"Now, then, for the civillest of all possible Noes," said the vicar, seating himself.

"But, surely, my dear Henry," said Mrs. Hartwell, "you will not refuse a proposal of marriage for your daughter, without letting her know that you have received it?"

"Most certainly I would not, were there a shadow of doubt as to what the answer must be. But as it is, dear wife, I really am of opinion that we shall act wisely by keeping Harriet ignorant of this most absurd proposal. After what we saw yes-

terday, it is impossible to deny that the silly child has felt flattered by the philandering fine speeches of my old acquaintance, and, although I am quite as firm in my belief of her refusal as her sister can possibly be, I still think that this offer may produce a sufficient flutter of gratified vanity to disturb her young philosophy ; and so, by your leave, my dear, I will venture to bring the negotiation to its conclusion without troubling little Harry by consulting her."

The compliant wife, and obedient daughter, received this decision in silence ; and the vicar immediately sat down, and penned the following epistle :—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"It is quite unnecessary I should tell you that I consider the proposal which you have made for the hand of my daughter, Harriet, as highly flattering, and were the dear child a few years older, I might be tempted by it to forget that she was not older still. But as it is, I feel myself obliged to decline an honour, which, under other circumstances, would of course be very gratifying to me.

"Believe me, my dear sir,

"Very faithfully yours,

"HENRY HARTWELL."

Having finished this epistle, and read it aloud, he sprinkled it carefully with sand, and began folding it up, desiring Mary to be kind enough to go into the kitchen, and bring him a lighted candle.

His daughter immediately left the room, and then his wife said, but in the gentlest of all possible accents,—

"Do you know, my dearest Henry, that I cannot in my heart approve your sending that letter, without Harriet's seeing it. I cannot, indeed, my dear love."

Mr. Hartwell finished writing the address, put the pen into the ink-bottle, and began rubbing his chin.

"It is so very seldom that we differ in opinion, dear wife, that I know I shall not feel satisfied if I act in opposition to your judgment now ; and yet, I must confess to you, that I doubt your being able to convince me that you are right. I was vexed to the heart, yesterday, at seeing Harriet make such a fool of herself—smiling, and blushing, and faltering, as if a fine young lover of five-and-twenty had been whispering a tender tale in her ear ; and, to a certain degree, I think her mind has been already injured by all this folly. It is to avoid, if possible, this young mind being more injured still, that I wish to keep her in ignorance of this proposal."

"I do so unfeignedly believe that you know best, Henry,"

replied his wife, "that I will dispute the point no further. Only, I must beg you will promise me that, if you do not inform her of Mr. Cuthbert's proposal now, you will never do it. I do not, and I cannot feel quite sure that, if Harriet were left entirely at liberty, she would refuse this offer; and I should, therefore, be very—very sorry she should ever hear of it, if she be not permitted to give her own answer to it now."

These words a good deal startled the vicar; but, before he could reply to them, Mary re-entered the room with the lighted candle.

"Now, then!" said Mr. Hartwell, in the accent of a man relieved from perplexity by a happy thought—"let us consult Mary! You do not like to contradict me, and I do not like to contradict you. Let Mary decide the question—shall she?"

"With all my heart!" said Mrs. Hartwell, cordially. "If she agrees with you, I shall feel my scruples greatly relieved."

"So be it, then," said the vicar. "You have heard my reply to Mr. Cuthbert's proposal, Mary?" he added. "Now, then,—tell us whether you think it will be most wise to let Harriet see it before it goes—or not?"

"I don't know about most wise, papa!" replied Mary, rather eagerly; "but I certainly think it would be most right to show it her!"

"I will not allow that there can be a difference, Mary; whatever is most right, is most wise—take my word for it. Go, then, my dear, and call Harriet to council. Give her no hint, however, as to the business before us. Only desire her to come directly, because I do not wish to detain the messenger long enough to suggest any idea that we had required time to deliberate."

Mary gave an intelligent nod, and vanished.

"Thank you a thousand times, dear Henry, for yielding to us. But it is amusing to observe how well two opinions, diametrically opposite, when joined together for one end, are able to attain it. Mary is anxious to communicate this offer to Harriet, because she thinks it right, dear girl, that the impossibility of her accepting it should be made manifest; while I am equally anxious that it should be communicated, because I doubt that any such impossibility exists."

"You wrong the child, my dear Mary—I am sure you do; and Mary the younger is right in wishing to convince you of it."

The messenger lost no time in performing her errand, for the two sisters entered the room together almost as soon as these words were spoken.

"Do you want me, papa?" said Harriet, with a slight accent

of impatience, as if she had been interrupted in some important occupation.

But before her father could utter more than "Yes, my dear!" the young lady's eye had caught sight of Mr. Cuthbert's letter, and she instantly, with more than Mesmeric lucidity, divined its contents. This miraculous perspicuity, however, led to no remark on her part, but the eloquent blood rushed to her face so vehemently, that father, mother, and sister, all felt assured that her active fancy had read the contents of the letter, though her eyes had only encountered the seal.

"Sit down, my love!" said her father.

Harriet obeyed; and was probably not at all displeased with the command. Mrs. Hartwell was already scared, and Mary slid behind her chair, and sat down on one so completely hidden by it, as to render herself almost invisible.

Mr. Hartwell, who was standing when Harriet entered, advanced a step towards the corner where she had placed herself, with both the letter and his answer to it in his hand. He plainly perceived that the dear little Harry was in a state of great agitation, and, with true fatherly feeling, would have avoided adding to this, had it been possible; but this could not be; and he therefore said, in as composed a manner as he could, "I have received a letter from Mr. Cuthbert, Harriet—the purport of which has greatly surprised me; for, notwithstanding his advanced age, which, within a year or two, is equal to my own, he proposes himself to you as a husband."

To this speech Harriet listened with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, but with a steadiness of countenance which rendered it quite impossible to read upon it the effect which the announcement produced on her. The blush which had so brightly suffused her fair face, on perceiving the open letter in her father's hand, had quite subsided, and, altogether, there was much more of resolute composure than of agitation in her aspect.

Her father contemplated her in silence for a moment, and then added, "I have written what I conceive to be a suitable answer to this letter. Would you like to see it, my dear, before I seal it?"

"If you please, papa," she quietly replied.

Mr. Hartwell put his own letter into her hand.

"May I see the other, sir?" said she.

"Certainly, my dear," replied her father. "Here it is."

She took it from him, made a step or two towards the window, as if for the advantage of light, and then so placed herself as to render her face invisible to the others. Mr. Cuthbert's letter ran thus:—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"In making the proposal which I am going to communicate to you, I beg, in the very first instance, to observe, that I neither forget nor overlook in any way the disparity of more kinds than one, which some persons may conceive sufficient to render the said proposal objectionable; but of the disparities I conceive myself and your daughter Harriet to be the only competent judges. Having said thus much, by way of preface, I beg to inform you, that it is my ardent wish to obtain the hand of your youngest daughter in marriage, and, with your permission, I will wait upon her this morning. Should her reply to my proposal be what I hope for, I will communicate to you, my dear sir, what my intentions are with respect to settlements.

"Believe me to remain, yours, very faithfully,
"JOHN FREDERICK AUGUSTUS CUTBERT."

Having very deliberately perused this letter, folded it, and deposited the precious document safely under the three last fingers of her left hand, she proceeded to open that of her father. And this, too, she read very deliberately; but, nevertheless, she remained stationary for about a minute after she had finished the perusal before she changed her position, as if meditating on the best manner of making her observations on it. And then she turned round, and father, mother, and sister, were probably all a little surprised at the sort of resolute steadiness which her countenance exhibited.

She looked handsomer, perhaps, than she had ever done in her life before; but she looked at least half a dozen years older at that moment than she had done at the same hour yesterday.

"Well, Harriet," said her father, gravely, "do you approve my answer?"

"No, papa," was her unfaltering reply.

A slight contraction was visible on the usually placid brow of the vicar.

"To what part of it do you object, Harriet? Does the manner of it appear objectionable? or is it the more important part; is it the refusal of his offer that you disapprove?"

"I do not wish to refuse his offer, papa," replied Harriet, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mary, with an involuntary intonation, so expressive of pain as to bring again a bright flush to the cheeks of Harriet; but without at all lowering the composed style of look, and attitude, expressive both of dignity and firmness, which she had assumed.

Mrs. Hartwell restrained all indication of feeling, and sat perfectly silent, and perfectly still.

"Am I really to understand, Harriet, that you wish to become the wife of Mr. Cuthbert?" said her father, with solemnity.

"If Mr. Cuthbert's regard for me is sufficiently strong to induce him to overlook my inferiority in all respects," returned Harriet, meekly, "I can wish for nothing so much as to prove that I am not ungrateful for his kindness."

"Did you expect this proposal, Harriet?" demanded her father.

"I certainly thought that Mr. Cuthbert had conceived a great regard for me," said Harriet; "but I scarcely dared to hope that he would propose to make me his wife."

"You scarcely dared to hope it?" repeated the vicar, with a sigh. "Then this offer gives you much pleasure, my dear girl?"

"Yes, papa," replied Harriet, without any species of hesitation.

"Then of course, my dear child, your family cannot reasonably oppose themselves to your accepting it. But, before I despatch the decisive letter which will bring him before you as your future husband, let me ask you, with all affection—and do you, dear love, answer me with all frankness—whether you really feel sufficient personal partiality for Mr. Cuthbert, to make you wish for him as a constant companion to the end of his life, or of yours? Or are you tempted, Harriet, by the splendour of his fortune and position in life, to sacrifice the liberty of all your gay young years, in order to become a fine lady?"

"It is not because I wish to become a fine lady, papa, but it is because I like Mr. Cuthbert very much indeed. I like his manners, and his conversation, and his way of thinking about everything, and that is the reason why I should like to be his wife."

"If such be the case," said Mr. Hartwell, turning to her mother, "I think that we have not any right to withhold our consent. Mr. Cuthbert is a gentleman who has always, I believe, borne an excellent character. I never remember to have heard anything against him in my life; and most assuredly it would be affectation to deny that his wealth and station are advantages which it is impossible to overlook. Only," he added, gravely, "even at the very moment when we feel ourselves most inclined to remember them, we ought to remember also, that wealth and station can in no degree render a woman's happiness independent of the personal qualities of her husband, or of the necessary feeling of affectionate sympathy between herself and him, without which every union, so very close and so very enduring, must, perforce, be productive of misery."

Harriet made no reply, but seemed to think that she had

already said all that was necessary to tranquillize all reasonable people on that subject, and then her father, after the interval of a moment, added—"Suppose, Harriet, that instead of immediately giving a positive answer to this proposal, I were to tell Mr. Cuthbert that I do not think the acquaintance long enough as yet to enable you to know each other sufficiently to justify your contracting so indissoluble an engagement; but that we shall be all of us very proud and happy to see him amongst us, as much as he can make it convenient during the next six months? At the end of which time, if you are both in the same mind, no objection will be made whatever on our part to the union."

Mrs. Hartwell and Mary both looked up with a visible expression of satisfaction on their features upon hearing these words from the vicar; but Harriet saw it not, for she kept her eyes as earnestly fixed on the closed letter of Mr. Cuthbert, which she still held closely clasped in her hand, as if she had deemed it an act of religious fidelity not to lose sight of it.

"What do you think of my proposition, my dear?" resumed her father.

"Of course, papa, you will say whatever you think most right and proper, to Mr. Cuthbert," she replied; "but as far as I am concerned, I certainly do not think it at all necessary."

"Then tell me exactly, my dear child, what it is you wish me to say?" said Mr. Hartwell.

"It seems to me that if you were to say, you should be glad to see him, it would give you less trouble than anything else, papa, and be much more satisfactory to him—and to me, too," she added, after the pause of a few seconds.

The vicar said nothing in reply, but, approaching the table, took another sheet of paper, on which he wrote the following words, which he immediately read aloud:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I have spoken to my daughter, Harriet, on the subject of your letter, and I see no reason to doubt that the visit which you propose to make us this morning will be welcome to her."

"Thank you, dear papa!" from Harriet, were the only words of commentary spoken on the perusal of this second epistle. The letter was folded, sealed, directed, and given to a servant, in perfect silence; but when the door was closed upon Jenny, who had answered the bell and received the letter, Harriet, stepping hastily towards her mother, looked tenderly in her face for a moment, and then, throwing her arms round her neck, gave her a fervent kiss, and said, "If you do not wish me joy now, mamma, you will some day—for you will see me very—oh, very happy!"

"God grant it, my darling child!" said Mrs. Hartwell, very earnestly, trying to conceal the tears which filled her eyes. "One person finds happiness in one sort of life, and another person in something quite different. In marriage, everybody ought to judge for themselves."

"Indeed, dear mamma, that is true; for nobody can tell what I feel for Mr. Cuthbert, but myself. And now," she added, in a whisper—"Mary and you must not think it unkind, if I say that I should like to be alone till he comes. May I?"

"Yes, dearest love—yes! It is quite natural. But do you feel too much agitated, my dear child? Shall Mary bring you a little red lavender?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried the happy bride-elect, running away from them, with a step that Mary thought was very lamentably youthful—"oh, no, no, no!—this letter is better than all the red lavender in the world!"

And in a moment she was out of sight, and they heard her light foot as she ran up-stairs; while the pensive mother, the anxious father, and almost terrified elder sister, looked at each other as if some tremendous catastrophe had fallen upon them, which had produced feelings almost too strong for utterance.

And then the father drew near to the mother, and spoke to her in a whisper; upon which, poor Mary, who readily understood that they might wish to be alone, quietly withdrew herself, and feeling as if she dared not at that moment run the risk of meeting Harriet, even by chance upon the stairs, she took a garden bonnet and shawl, which always lay ready in a corner of the hall, and made her escape into the little shrubbery, which led from the Vicarage to the church.

In this shrubbery was a bench, with a little grass plot round it, which had been the scene of many of the happiest hours of Mary's life. Mary was a great reader. Her father's old-fashioned library had wherewithal to supply her with enough, and more than enough, to occupy every leisure moment which her necessary needlework and her long walks left her; and this seat, and its well-shorn grass plot, had been her resort in these precious leisure moments—not only during the genial hours of the warmer portion of the year, but often when everybody else declared it was bitterly cold; for even then Mary Hartwell would still prefer the shelter of the evergreens and her large cloak to any other retreat, as a reading-room.

To this seat the poor girl now ran, almost instinctively, as the safest place in which to hide herself during the first endurance of feelings inexpressibly painful, and which she was perfectly conscious it was her duty to conceal.

But on the shrubbery-seat there was no occasion for conceal-

ment, and therefore she yielded without scruple to the strong inclination which, had seized upon her to weep ; and weep she did, heartily and unrestrainedly, for several minutes.

It is a great mistake to say to women, when under strong emotion of any kind, "Don't cry !" for it is by much the best thing they can do. It is a part of their nature, and a very kindly part, too ; and though long teaching, or a very sturdy disposition, may enable some of us to do without this indulgence, we all do a vast deal better with it ; that is to say, when circumstances are such as to make a truly feminine heart require this truly feminine relief. And such, most assuredly, was the case with Mary Hartwell at that moment ; but, the relief obtained, and the bursting sensation of the swelling heart assuaged, she wiped her pretty eyes, with the rational determination to weep no more—if she could help it ; but to look upon the strange event which was about to happen in the family loss through the medium of her own feelings, and more according to the view which she thought it likely that most other people would take of it.

And having set herself really and sincerely to do this, she soon felt that it was impossible to deny the existence of many more favourable points of view from which to look at this event, than that from which she herself contemplated it.

She loved her sister very dearly ; so dearly, that such points of her character as could not fairly be classed more favourably than as weaknesses she had never yet dwelt upon sufficiently to class at all. Among these was a very decided inclination to be a little finer in all ways than her neighbours ; that is to say, than such of them as were in the same class of society as herself.

Little Harry, moreover, was wont occasionally to breathe into her sister's ear a good deal of useless regret that their talents could not receive all the aid from instruction of which a young lady with whom they were acquainted in Exeter had often boasted. Both sisters could repeat an air, when they had heard it, with the truth of an echo ; but the obtaining a music-master for them the good vicar had considered as about equally unnecessary and impossible. And in the matter of foreign languages, it was Harriet's theory, that nothing effectual could be done as to the acquirement of them without a native master. This, indeed, was a point upon which the two sisters disagreed so decidedly, that, in order to avoid disputes, they had mutually decided that each one should go her own way, without attempting to influence the other by argument ; and the consequence of this was, that Mary had contrived, with a little help from her father, to teach herself to read very fluently both French and Italian. But as this help from the learned vicar was only

such as a good Latin scholar can always give, and went solely to construction, and in no degree to pronunciation, Harriet often made herself very merry by making her accomplished Exeter friend listen to Mary's blunders in this line.

But this merriment was always shared, and never resented; Mary's philosophy on the subject being founded on the honestly-acknowledged fact, that her ambition was limited to the being able to understand the French and Italian she read, and had nothing to do with any hope of making others understand her if she spoke those languages; which modest limitation was the more easily adhered to, from the very great improbability that she should ever find it necessary to speak any but her own.

"Now, then," thought the kind-hearted girl, "our little Harry may have masters in everything. She is quite young enough to learn, and it will be the very best and pleasantest way of filling up her time; for, of course, we must not expect that an old gentleman like Mr. Cuthbert can go on giving up his time so entirely to a young thing like Harriet, as he did when he was staying here."

And these thoughts were so very pleasant, that not only did she cease to weep, but she began to smile, and positively longed to see her sister, whom half an hour before she had dreaded to meet, that she might communicate her agreeable prophecies, and wish her truly and sincerely joy of the advantages which were opening before her. Never did even the affectionate Mary Hartwell give a stronger proof of her loving nature, than she did when thus endeavouring to persuade herself that she might be brought to rejoice at this strange marriage of her sister; for the alliance, even in its most favourable point of view, was very decidedly hostile to her own private interests, and she felt that it was so with most painful certainty, but drove the conviction from her memory with all the mental strength she had, and if the effort was not quite successful, it was, at least, most perfectly sincere.

For the causes why so splendid a marriage as that about to be contracted by her sister was likely to be detrimental to her, we must refer to the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.

At the distance of about two miles and a half from the Vicarage-house of Penmorris, was the residence of a very respectable and substantial landholder, who, if there were any such in our days, which I greatly doubt, would unquestionably

be called a farmer ; but, some thirty or forty years ago, it was still customary to mitigate this rude designation, by prefixing the word gentleman to it ; and "gentleman farmer" would have been the answer given, at the time of which I write, to any who might have inquired concerning the rank and station of Mr. Marshdale, of Five-Elms Farm.

The possession of the flourishing little freehold so called, might perhaps, either then or now, have challenged the epithet of gentleman for its owner, had he not, from youth to age, been accustomed to assist in ploughing his own land with his own hand ; and for this reason it was that nobody called him "gentleman," without qualifying the lofty epithet, by adding that of farmer to it.

If the venerable distinction of title-deeds which might have been fairly copied, in good text hand, upon a quarter of a sheet of writing paper, and which had not changed hands for above three hundred years, might be received in proof of gentility, Mr. Marshdale, of Five-Elms Farm, ought not to be accounted as one of the "crestless yeomen" of whom Shakespeare speaks with so little reverence.

But little cared he for any such distinction ; and once upon a time, when a neighbouring nobleman, who had called to canvass him for his vote, and who, upon some former occasion had been favoured with a sight of this bit of yellow parchment, observed, in very flattering accents, that he must doubtless be entitled to very honourable armorial bearings, inasmuch as it was difficult to suppose that a gift of lands in those days could have been bestowed for aught but military service, the old man replied, "I don't quite see that, my lord ; I don't quite see any good reason why we may not flatter ourselves that our good acres were given to our long-ago ancestor because he was an honest man."

This Mr. Marshdale had lost his wife when his three children were still very young ; but her loss had now been for years as well supplied by his daughter (who fortunately was the eldest of the three) as a young girl could possibly supply it. His other children were boys, and they were all now come to years of discretion, for the youngest had completed his twenty-second year.

With this family of Marshdale, that of Hartwell had lived, for the last twenty years, on terms of the closest intimacy. I have described their position in the world so faithfully, that it would be useless to add another word with any view to making it more clearly understood, and yet I am quite aware that no very precise idea of it is likely to be the result. Their position as to their station in society was, in truth, exactly one of those which, however clearly defined, as to fact, may vary almost from

one end of the social line to the other, according to accidental circumstances.

In the case of the Marshdales, some of these accidental circumstances were very much for, and some others very much against, them.

Among the former, were the high esteem and cordial affection with which Mr. Hartwell (in whose parish they lived) and all his family regarded them; and among the latter must certainly be classed the immovable pertinacity with which old Mrs. Osterly constantly refused to consider them in any other light than as a decent sort of agricultural labourers.

It was in vain that Mr. Hartwell, again and again, endeavoured to make her understand that the excellent and liberal education which Mr. Marshdale had given to his two sons, effectually placed them in a higher rank.

"I wish it may turn to good, sir," was the only answer which he ever obtained by his friendly representations; and once, when he indulged himself by telling her that several of the best country families were beginning to find what valuable neighbours the young Marshdales were, she replied by saying—

"Heaven grant, Mr. Hartwell, that the cloven foot of the universal enemy may not, at last, be seen in all this! I never hear, Mr. Hartwell, of a real gentleman forgetting the station of life in which Providence has placed him, without a trembling fear taking hold upon me, lest it should prove a symptom of the horrible pestilence of treason and blasphemy which has overrun France. When the gentry begin to associate with the labouring classes, Mr. Hartwell, you may be very sure that mischief is brewing. The ill-advised persons you allude to, sir, I dare say, call themselves liberal. It is a hateful word, Mr. Hartwell—a hateful and a dangerous word, and there are few crimes, sir, that I would not rather be accused of than that of being liberal."

What made such feelings towards the Marshdale family the more unfortunate was, that Mrs. Osterly was universally considered as the leading personage in this immediate neighbourhood; and as long as she obstinately persisted in calling the owner of Five-Elms "Farmer Marshdale," and never mentioned his family in any other terms than as the children of "Farmer Marshdale," it was next to impossible that they should ever be considered as holding any higher situation in the county than other individuals similarly designated.

But, fortunately for their own happiness, the Marshdales were peculiarly unobtrusive people, and cared wondrously little about old Mrs. Osterly of the Manor House, or anything she might say or think about them.

Their intimate and affectionate intercourse with the Hart-

well family seemed to be all they wished or wanted in the way of social enjoyment—an exclusive sort of feeling, which did not arise from any want of general benevolence, but was easily to be accounted for by the fact that Mr. Hartwell, very early in his ministry, had made the discovery that “Farmer Marshdale” was not only one of the most perfectly well-conducted individuals in his parish, but a man of a very high order of intelligence into the bargain.

Then came the loss of poor Marshdale’s still young wife, which awakened in the kindly hearts of the vicar and his help-mate that species of pitying kindness which is so truly “twice blest,” softening the hearts of those who give, and those who receive it.

It was not in the nature of things that the manly grief of their worthy neighbour, the pious resignation, the fatherly fondness, which treasured every nursery hint, should fail of producing their natural effects on the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell, merely because Mrs. Osterly and a few others after her, persevered in designating this excellent and truly admirable man “Farmer Marshdale.” On the contrary, it was in the nature of things that they should soon prefer the society of Mr. Marshdale to that of any other individual in the parish.

And then, it was such a pleasure to them to see his sad eye gradually resuming its natural expression of cheerfulness, and to watch the delighted gratitude and the intense pleasure with which he witnessed Mrs. Hartwell’s motherly sort of superintendence of all his young daughter’s goings on.

Susan Marshdale was only ten years old when her mother died ; and as soon as her poor father had sufficiently recovered from the shock to look about him, it was very evident that anxiety about his daughter was what most heavily pressed upon his mind. She was rather a remarkable child, and one that any father might have clung to, as an affectionate, loving little creature, who seemed born to give him all that home-bred comfort and consolation which it is the glory of a daughter to bestow. But poor Marshdale thought that, of all the little girls that ever were born, she was the one whom it would be the greatest pity to send to school. She was so very simple, so very true, and so beautiful in earnest, in word, thought, and deed, that, as he modestly expressed it, he must make her something different, if he did not make her something worse, by sending her to a boarding school, and he honestly confessed that he did not wish to do anything that was likely essentially to change her natural disposition.

But what was he to do about her education ? She read perfectly, and with a degree of intelligence that he certainly did think rather remarkable ; and, moreover, the little creature

used both her needle and her pen with more dexterity than was common at her age ; but, nevertheless, he was quite aware that he should be both ridiculed and blamed were he to confess that he thought her education sufficiently advanced to go on perfectly well with no better assistance than he himself was able to give her ; and he knew this would not do. He knew thoroughly that all the old women in the parish would cry "Shame !" upon him. And then it was that Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell bound him to them for life by offering to let his little girl come to the Vicarage every day, for the purpose of taking lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, and the use of the needle, from Mrs. Hartwell.

This sort of intercourse not only drew the two families very closely together, but, as far as Mr. Marshdale was concerned, rendered any intimate association with all the rest of the neighbourhood a matter of great indifference.

Never was a kind act better rewarded than this of Mrs. Hartwell. The teaching of Susan Marshdale really was all pleasure and no pain ; and by the time she was fifteen, she became so very useful an assistant to the vicar's lady in the process of instructing her two little girls, the eldest of whom was just seven years younger than Susan, that she most sincerely assured Mr. Marshdale that the obligation was now entirely on her side.

Mrs. Marshdale's two little boys, the one two and the other five years younger than their sister, had both been sent early to an excellent school ; and the younger of the two had so earnestly pleaded for leave to go to the University of Oxford upon a scholarship which he was quite sure of obtaining from his school, that the request, though considered as rather an ambitious one, was granted by his father ; and at the period at which my narrative begins, this younger son, whose name was Charles, had just been admitted to deacon's orders.

Godfrey, the elder, was of course aware, from his earliest years, that his prospects were of a very different kind ; and perhaps there had been moments when the consciousness that his education must stop short, in order that he might devote himself, as his honoured father had done before him, to the cultivation of his ancestral fields, had brought something like a pang to his heart. But he well knew that this was the price he had to pay for the acres he was to inherit, and he submitted with the best grace he could, consoling himself by recollecting that it was thus that the fate of his brother and his own were made equal—Charles being blessed by the power of obtaining all the advantages which education can bestow, while he was to enjoy the possession of land which, at a fair rental, might bring him an income of three hundred a-year.

Had he, at the age of eighteen, been permitted a choice between his brother's situation and his own, he would most decidedly have changed places with him; but as he grew older, he began to think differently. The land that, if let, would bring three hundred a-year, was worth double if cultivated by the proprietor; and though a thousand pounds was to be raised upon it after their father's death for Charles, and one hundred a year to be paid to Susan for the term of her natural life, there would be still enough left for a reasonable man to marry upon very contentedly.

And how came it that before Godfrey had quite completed his twenty-third year all his learned ambition had subsided in such matter-of-fact wisdom as this? Was it the result of meditation, as he walked at dawn of day upon the uplands, to see what sort of a bite his sheep got there? or was it while practically making himself master of the art of ploughing? No; it all came upon him as he happened to be looking at Mary Hartwell while she was helping her father to transplant geraniums.

This change in his opinions, however, was never mentioned to anybody for very nearly a year after it took place; nor was there any need that it should be; for, in fact, he had never communicated his longings after Alma Mater to any one. But when nearly a year, as I have said, had witnessed his perfect recovery from this longing, he did mention to Mary the fact that it had existed, together with the additional fact that he had quite changed his opinion upon the subject.

"I am glad of that, Godfrey!" she had replied, in a tone that testified her sincerity—"for nothing can so certainly make people unhappy as wishing for what they cannot obtain."

"True, Mary!" was the rejoinder—"but I am not quite sure that I have got quite to the end of all such folly as yet; for though I think it very possible that I may live contented without going to Oxford, and that it is possible I might find very perfect happiness in cultivating our fields, as my good father has done before me, yet I have not quite done wishing for something else into the bargain."

And then, as if fearing that the new ambition of his heart might be suspected, he hastened to say, colouring to the eyes as he spoke, "that although the advantages of a learned education were beyond his reach, he still cherished the hope that his destiny would not be such as to forbid some cultivation of mind—some such pursuit for his leisure hours, at least, as might not leave his life quite uncheered by intellectual gratification!"

"Oh! dear no! why should it?" was the eager reply. And then Mary went on descanting upon the great advantages she

derived from her father's library. And then she told him that she was very sure that he might have all the books he wanted. And then he told her that he wanted a little of her assistance too, particularly in the reading French and Italian; the difficulties of which, Susan had told him, she had completely mastered. And to this she replied with very neighbourly friendliness and good nature.

The same sort of conversation was renewed between them very frequently afterwards, till at last (to make a long story short) they both found out that no books were so delightful as those which they read—or, at any rate, which they discussed—together; and that the only possible way in which they could either of them ever rationally hope to enjoy happiness was by spending their lives together.

No two human beings ever agreed more completely in opinion on any point than Godfrey Marshdale and Mary Hartwell did on this; but they both agreed, too, that there would be some difficulties to be overcome before this very pleasant and rational project could be put in execution.

No really reasonable people, perhaps, could desire to live more perfectly at their ease as to money matters than did the two families of Hartwell and Marshdale; but, nevertheless, the daughter of the one, and the son of the other, knew perfectly well—each and both of them knew perfectly well—that it was not in the power of their parents to portion them off in such a manner as to enable them to set up housekeeping for themselves.

"Well, then, dearest Mary, we must wait!" was the reply of the young man to a rather melancholy remonstrance on the part of Mary upon the folly of indulging in hopes that perhaps could never be realised. "But, at least," he added—"let us have all the consolation that our pledged vows can give! Promise me, my sweet Mary, that this precious hand shall never be given to another, till I am laid so deep in earth that even that could have no power to torture me!"

"And so I would, Godfrey! and so I will!" she replied—"upon one condition. Dearest Godfrey! I cannot—I may not do so solemn a thing as plight my faith without the knowledge and consent of my father and mother. My heart would not be tranquil enough to let me speak the words even if my will urged me to it. And your father, Godfrey, he, too, must know of it, and consent to it, or we must not speak these comforting, these solemn words!"

Notwithstanding the pure and perfect decorum of this young courtship, it was at that moment beyond the power of Godfrey Marshdale to refrain from throwing his arms round the innocent girl who sat beside him, with her gentle earnest eyes fixed lovingly upon his, yet with a grave expression in

them that was not quite a frown, but which spoke more eloquently than even her earnest words could do, of the steadfast principle which would render her then, and for ever, incapable of doing anything that she believed to be wrong.

And not only did he throw his arms around her, but, for the first time in his life, he pressed his lips upon her fair young cheek. For one short moment she felt bewildered, and too much beside herself, as she called it, when meditating upon the scene afterwards, to be as angry as she ought to have been; and then, before this inevitable anger could take any definite shape, it was smothered in the birth by the offender exclaiming, "Oh! do not think so vilely of me, dearest Mary, as to suppose I would attempt to beguile you into doing wrong! And most wrong would it be in either of us were we to make a secret vow, unsanctioned by our parents. No, no, sweet Mary! I will not try to win a wife by teaching the creature I love best to forget her duty. Do you but give me leave to do it, and I will undertake the task of communicating our wishes and our hopes to those who, next to ourselves, are most interested in them. But do you know, Mary," he continued, after the meditation of a moment—"do you know, dearest, that there is one person who must be included in our confidential revelations, whose cordial approval of our hopes it will be more difficult to obtain, if I mistake not, than that of either of our parents? Can you not guess who I mean?"

Mary coloured, and was silent.

"You have guessed rightly, dearest," he added, with a smile. "Yes, it is your sister Harriet that I mean."

"My sister Harriet loves me too dearly," replied Mary, recovering her composure, "to make any serious objection to anything likely to contribute to my happiness."

Godfrey smiled. "Perhaps she may do it playfully, Mary," said he; "but you may depend upon it, that she will not hear me named as aspiring to the happiness of being your husband, without hinting to you, in some manner or other, that Miss Hartwell has a right to expect a higher alliance; and that the son of Farmer Marshdale has shown more ambition than modesty in proposing to the daughter of the clergyman of Penmorris."

"Nonsense!" returned Mary, laughing, "are you not ashamed of mimicking my pretty sister in that abominable style? She will say no such thing, Godfrey. I will not deny that she is, now and then, a little inclined to play at being a fine lady, and has, perhaps, rather more reverence for all the smart folks in Exeter than I think quite reasonable; but all this is only on the surface, Godfrey—at the bottom of her dear little heart there is more love for her father, mother, and sister, than

she ever did, or ever will, feel for all the fine folks in the world."

"And you will let me speak to your father, Mary?" said the young man, looking at her animated countenance, as she said this, with positive admiration.

"Yes, Godfrey," she replied, almost in a whisper, and as if frightened at the idea of a step so bold and decided.

"Yes, dearest Godfrey," she added, more firmly—"I wish you to do it, but not quite yet. Papa has this very day been inviting an old college friend to come and stay a few days here, and I should not like your application to be made to him till after this visit is over. I should wish him to be quite at leisure to hear and to answer you."

"I will bide my time, dearest!" said the young man—"or rather your time, sweet Mary! for I will do nothing till you give permission. And when you do, I will not delay an hour before I profit by it."

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Can it be denied that, after this, it required a very perfect abnegation of self to enable Mary Hartwell to contemplate her sister's marriage with Mr. Cuthbert complacently?

CHAPTER XI.

THE important step being once taken, the aged lover lost no time in profiting by the acceptance which even a less vain man than himself could not fail to find in the satisfactory, though laconic, note of Mr. Hartwell. The visit which followed was, in the first instance, received by Harriet alone; but about half an hour after Mr. Cuthbert's arrival, Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell entered the best parlour, with hearts perhaps not perfectly tranquil, but with smiling faces.

Love scenes, when detailed at length, have frequently been accounted unprofitable reading, I believe, even when the parties were the most "fitly formed to meet by nature;" and I could scarcely hope to get through that which followed Mr. Cuthbert's introduction to Harriet Hartwell, without involuntarily giving it some touch of the ridiculous. For, let a gentleman of three score be as elegant and agreeable as it is in the nature of things for him to be, he can scarcely address a lady of considerably less than one score, in the character of a lover, without a great risk of saying or doing something which, to the world in general, might appear absurd.

Suffice it, then, that I assure my readers that this trying

scene between Mr. Cuthbert and Harriet passed off quite as well, or, perhaps, rather better, than could have been expected ; but, nevertheless, it is just possible that the young lady might have felt rather less displeased by the entrance of her parents than might have been the case if some of the circumstances attending her interesting position had been different from what they were.

Nothing, however, could possibly be more perfect in its way than the manner in which Mr. Cuthbert renewed, *viâ voce*, to Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell, the expression of his hopes of being blessed by their bestowing upon him the hand of their lovely daughter.

Having performed this part of the necessary ceremonial attendant upon the business in which he was engaged, and received in return an answer, dictated by the same admirable spirit of propriety, Mr. Cuthbert laid two fingers of his right hand upon the left arm of his future father-in-law, and whispered a wish that he would withdraw with him for a few moments. Mr. Hartwell looked towards his wife, who, actuated by the self-same spirit, took her young daughter by the hand, and led her out of the room.

When the two elderly gentlemen found themselves thus tête-à-tête, they both, or more properly speaking, they each, felt that they had important business before them, for nothing could be much less alike than were their feelings.

Poor Mr. Hartwell experienced a sensation of heavy-heartedness, which made him sigh, whether he would or not ; and though never less inclined to admire wealth, or to covet its approach in any shape, he nevertheless felt more deeply conscious of his own comparative poverty, and more really embarrassed by it, than he had ever done in all his life before ; while, on the other hand, Mr. Cuthbert, though most certainly at no time unmindful of, or indifferent to, the manifold advantages which he enjoyed in this respect over the great majority of his fellow-creatures, had probably never so deeply felt, and so proudly gloried in these advantages, as at the present moment. But still he was gracious—wonderfully gracious ! and wonderfully condescending too, considering that his heart was swelling till it almost burst his black satin waistcoat, as he thought of the noble generosity of the passion which dictated the line of conduct he was pursuing. "There are many men," thought he, "who, if they had found a lovely young creature as devotedly attached to them as this sweet girl is to me, would have taken advantage of her tenderness and love, and have married her without a settlement, but I know better how to turn my 'bonne fortune' to profit. She shall give beauty and grace to everything belonging to me ; and, while charming every eye,

her devotion to me shall bring a pang of envy to many a heart! My generosity will create its own reward!"

With these thoughts glowing in his bosom, with all the ardour that vanity and love can awaken at threescore, Mr. Cuthbert smiled pleasantly in the face of the vicar, and said, "Well, my dear Mr. Hartwell, I believe that little more remains to be discussed in the way of settling matters between us, than what relates to my pecuniary arrangements, and these, as I am willing to flatter myself, are not very likely to meet with opposition from you."

Mr. Hartwell bowed, making an effort as he did so not to look too grave.

"I propose, sir," resumed Mr. Cuthbert, "to settle upon your daughter Harriet, for her natural life, an income of two thousand a-year, secured upon my Kentish property—more would exceed what I should deem it proper to abstract from the revenue of my heirs, and less would not suffice to support her in the style which I should wish her to keep up as my widow, in case it should please Heaven that she should survive me."

Here Mr. Cuthbert paused; and probably expected some manifestation of applause and admiration from the young lady's father; but Mr. Hartwell's features expressed no emotion whatever; he only bowed his head slightly when his future son-in-law ceased to speak.

"Perhaps, my dear sir," resumed the lover, "you may think that a settlement of two thousand a-year is scarcely in proportion to the extent of my income; but we must remember, Mr. Hartwell, that our dear Miss Harriet is likely to become a very young mother, and, such being the case, it becomes my duty to remember that her son may be kept out of this portion of his property for many years, for which reason I should not think it right to make the dowager's income exceed the sum I have named. Do you agree with me, sir?"

"Upon my word, Mr. Cuthbert, I am a very incompetent judge in such matters," replied the vicar; "two thousand a-year must, I should think, be a very ample income for any widow lady."

"It is not large; by no means large for my widow," resumed Mr. Cuthbert. "But, all circumstances considered, I think it may suffice. Not, however, without the addition of a residence—I have no thought of the kind. On the contrary, indeed, I fully purpose to indulge your fair daughter, who is a most sweet young lady, with the possession of my very handsome residence in Cavendish Square till such time as her eldest son shall marry—provided, of course, that I myself should be defunct at the time of that event. Should it please God to take me to himself before the marriage of my eldest son, I should wish

that my London house should be kept up by my widow, till that event takes place. She will moreover, of course, possess, for the term of her natural life, the mansion which is upon my Kentish property, and which is known by the name of Cuthbert Hall. This mansion has been the residence of the dowagers of my family for many generations, and as many of these have been of noble extraction, and all have been well satisfied with it, I venture to flatter myself that no objection will occur to you on that score?"

As these last words were uttered interrogatively, Mr. Hartwell, poor man, though miserably sick at heart, felt it necessary to utter something in reply to them, which he did, by saying that there could indeed be no danger of any objection on his part to arrangements so evidently liberal.

And then Mr. Cuthbert bowed, and furthermore proceeded to say that, as his mother had enjoyed an allowance of two hundred a-year for pin-money, it was his intention to make the same arrangement for his wife: and this produced another slight bow from Mr. Hartwell, and then Mr. Cuthbert, rather stiffly, took his leave, feeling, perhaps, a little disappointed at not having elicited any stronger expressions of gratitude by his noble liberality.

But in truth, the good vicar cared not one single straw for his liberality. The idea that his beautiful young daughter was to become the wife of his antiquated college contemporary was exceedingly disagreeable to him: and when the departure of Mr. Cuthbert left him to his own reflections, he felt that he had behaved as cordially as he could, and perhaps rather more so than he had intended.

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And from that day the preparations for the marriage of Harriet Hartwell and Mr. Cuthbert went on regularly and prosperously, without any impediment whatever. For the horror, — the dismay — the indignation expressed by Mrs. Osterly upon being made acquainted with what was going on, made little or rather no impression on either the gentleman or the lady.

Mr. Cuthbert, on making up his mind to marry Harriet Hartwell, made up his mind also to offend vehemently, and it might be for ever, his venerable cousin, the lady of Penmorris Manor. But when gravely considering the question, as to whether the possibility of inheriting Mrs. Osterly's two thousand five hundred a-year ought to be put in competition with the happiness likely to arise from marrying a beautiful girl, who was so passionately in love with him as Harriet Hartwell, he deliberately came to the conclusion that it certainly ought not; and he therefore listened to all she chose to say to him with precisely

that sort of passive resistance with which a rock receives the buffetings of the waves.

And as to Harriet, though she was by no means left in ignorance as to the manner in which their proud neighbour had received the intelligence of their approaching cousinship, she certainly, if the whole truth must be told, felt more pleasure than pain from the hearing it. For, in the first place, it seemed to ensure her escape from the intolerable restraint which every possible style of visiting at the Manor House must be sure to inflict; and, in the second, it created a less justifiable emotion of pleasure from the feeling that she was about, in some sort, to avenge herself for all the mortifications she had endured from the stiff old lady's pride, during all the series of haughty hospitalities which she had been obliged to receive from her.

Mrs. Osterly's wrath was indeed great; so great as to cause her to make and proclaim a resolution never to receive her besotted kinsman (as she was pleased to call him) within her doors again,—never to inscribe his degraded name upon her will,—and never, if she could possibly avoid it, to have any further intercourse with the presumptuous inhabitants of the Vicarage.

But none of these resolves, though reiterated again and again in the presence of Mr. Cuthbert, had the slightest tendency to prevent, or even to postpone the marriage she deprecated, which took place, accordingly, exactly ten weeks after the offer was made. During these ten busy weeks, Mary lived so much more for her sister than herself, that all her own affairs and almost all her own feelings were, if not forgotten, at least postponed, and to this postponement Godfrey Marshdale gave his full consent and approbation, being very rationally aware, that when hearts, heads, and hands were all completely occupied on one subject, there would be great want of judgment shown in attempting to introduce another.

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER from Mrs. Hartwell to her friend Miss Margaret Johnson, written about this time, will serve to show how matters went on at the Vicarage during the interval between Mr. Cuthbert's declaration, and the departure of the young Harriet from her father's house, which was the consequence of it.

“MY DEAR MARGARET,

“I am beginning a letter which I have no intention of

finishing just at present, but as I have a good deal to tell you, it will be more convenient for me, as I think I am likely to be very busy, to scribble a little at a time.

"But I must begin by telling you, my dear old friend, that I was more right than you gave me credit for being, when I told you that I thought Mrs. Osterly's cousin, Mr. Cuthbert, admired our pretty Harriet. A very few days after I received the letter in which you advised me not to make myself uneasy by believing that any such thing was likely, all hopes and all fears on the subject were alike set at rest, by the old gentleman's making her a proposal of marriage. I believe there are some cases in which things which we dislike at a distance, and when looked at through doubt and uncertainty, become less disagreeable when they appear before us as actual present realities; but this is not one of them. My fears of Mr. Cuthbert's admiration were not, as you may remember, unaccompanied by still more disagreeable fears as to the effect which it might produce on the vanity of my dear girl. And here, too, my fears were true prophets. In a word, Margaret, our dear, but very, very silly child is going, before she has fully completed her nineteenth year, to become the wife of Mr. Cuthbert, whose age more than trebles hers—and not only with her own consent, but by her own wish and will, and that so strongly expressed as to induce her father to withdraw the opposition he had at first manifested, from perceiving that it would be both painful and ineffectual.

"But it is best to forget as fast as we can what were the feelings of her father, her sister, and myself, on first hearing her declare that it was her wish to become Mr. Cuthbert's wife. Let us now think of the future; in some lights it certainly looks bright enough, and perhaps we may, in our ignorance of such things, have undervalued the enjoyments which it is in the power of wealth and station to bestow. But I must put by my letter for the present, for Mary tells me that a huge packet of Irish linen is just arrived from Falmouth, and that nothing will go well if I am not present when it is cut up.

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"It is more than a fortnight, my dear Margaret, since I wrote the above fragment, and from that time to this I have literally never found a moment sufficiently at my own disposal to enable me to go on with it—and now, I don't think it will be worth while to make you pay postage twice over, and so I shall go scribbling on a bit and a bit at a time, till—till I have no longer a Harriet Hartwell belonging to me.

"Mrs. Osterly is, as we all expected she would be, exceedingly angry, and she has, I am sorry to say, given one proof

of it which I thought too well of her to have believed possible. She has never appeared at church since the affair was disclosed to her, and this certainly shows a state of mind which nothing can justify. She has formally announced to her cousin, Mr. Cuthbert, in writing, that he is never to appear in her presence again, as he has, she says, shown such weakness of character, and such a total disregard of propriety of every kind, as has converted regard into contempt, and affection into dislike. She concludes this short, but very pithy epistle, by observing that she now remembers with greater satisfaction than she had ever expected to do, the fact that she has another cousin standing in precisely the same degree of relationship to her as himself. This alludes, I suppose, to a very eccentric person whom my husband and I remember to have seen once, and once only, at the Manor House, a few weeks after we had returned from our marriage tour, and settled at the Vicarage. If the effect of this sudden recollection should be to bring this extraordinary Miss Maberly Montagu to Penmorris again, I think it very possible that Mrs. Osterly may live to repent the having exchanged a foolish cousin for a mad one; for I well remember that we returned from the Manor House, the first time we ever dined there, with a very strong suspicion that this lady was scarcely in her right mind. Several months elapsed before we were again invited to dine there, and as her departure preceded this second invitation only by a few days, we were led to suspect that the lady of the Manor was sufficiently aware of her cousin's eccentricity to prevent her inviting us to witness it. But let her be as mad as she may, it will make no difference to us now, even if she were summoned, as heir apparent, to take up her residence entirely at the Manor House, for I presume that we shall never be invited to enter it again. I think Henry will regret this more than I shall do; not that he liked the stiff dinners much better than the rest of us, but I am sure he will feel the breaking off all friendly communication with a parishioner as very painful. He does seem so vexed, dear good man, about her not coming to church!

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"Mr. Cuthbert has been extremely liberal, we think, respecting settlements. Harriet is to have a place called Cuthbert Hall, and the house in Cavendish Square, settled upon her for life, I believe, in case she survives her husband; and also two thousand a-year, which to us, as you will easily believe, seems immense. She is to have two hundred a-year while he lives, secured to her as pin-money; so that, as far as money goes, she will have made a great marriage. May God, in his great mercy, grant that she may make good use of her wealth!

And if she does, we shall, at least, be sure that she possesses one source of happiness. But nevertheless, Margaret, my heart is at times very heavy about her. It is clear to me that the poor child mistakes her own feelings. She is pleased by his gentlemanlike appearance and manners, and her vanity has been highly gratified by the marked attention he has paid her from the first hour of his arrival at the Vicarage. And these pleasant feelings she mistakes for love! Dear lamb! Her mind is as innocent as that of a baby, and I am persuaded that had we absolutely refused our consent to this ill-assorted marriage, she would have positively pined under the persuasion that we had not only blighted all her worldly prospects, but that we had sacrificed the affections of her heart, to our own mistaken theories. In short, it is perfectly evident, and even Mary is now of the same opinion, that we could not have prevented the alliance, without making her very miserable, and this we surely had no right to do, there being nothing in the character of Mr. Cuthbert to justify our opposing her marriage with him.

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"I hope the dear child's head will not be turned by all the finery with which she is going to be surrounded, but it is a great trial for a giddy young head. The very gayest and handsomest carriage I ever saw is just arrived at the King's Head, and you would wonder where the people come from, if you could see the crowd that is assembled round it. Mr. Cuthbert has insisted upon her having a London maid to wait upon her, for fear that one of our country damsels might blunder in putting on her fine dresses; and this London maid has come down in the carriage. I can scarcely be said to have seen her, but from the glance I had as she passed by me in the passage, as she was going to present herself to her new mistress, I should say she was too much like a lady in appearance, to make it probable that she would be very useful as a servant. I should be sorry to change my Susan for her. However, this is hardly fair, and this vastly genteel Mrs. Selby may be a treasure, for anything I know to the contrary.

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"Think of my being called down to the kitchen, my dear Margaret, to superintend the making of my Harriet's wedding-cake! She is to be married next Tuesday! There are moments when it all seems more like a dream than a reality; and perhaps when I am fully awake, I may like it still less than I do now.

"Our dear Mary behaves like an angel. Her averseness to this marriage was decidedly a stronger feeling than either her

father or I experienced against it, and that is saying much for its strength, I assure you. But no sooner did she become convinced that the thing was really to be, than she seemed to forget that she had any feelings of her own on the subject, the only object of her existence now is to make Harriet feel happy—perfectly, completely happy in every way.

“It is usual in this neighbourhood—I don’t know what it may be in the fine world, but here it certainly is usual for a bride to invite her sister, if she happens to have one, to accompany her on her wedding-tour; and I confess that I expected this so completely, that I was puzzling my head how to get a couple of handsome dresses, one morning and one evening, from Exeter, for Mary. I could not ask Mr. Cuthbert to get the female friend whom he has employed in London, to send down a few dresses for Harriet (just to make her look a little like other people, as he said, while she was travelling)—I could not, I say, ask him to order anything for Mary, because it would be like asking him to pay for it. And here again is a point upon which, I suppose, I am a little unreasonable. I mean, about Harriet’s dresses. We always spend our income, or very nearly so, every year, and therefore, in order to give our dear child enough for a respectable stock of wedding clothes, we sold out one hundred pounds of my money for the purpose. But before the end of the week in which he made his proposals, Mr. Cuthbert took an opportunity of saying to me that he hoped I should not give myself any trouble about Harriet’s attire, for that it was quite out of the question to suppose she could ever wear, as Mrs. Cuthbert, anything that was made for her in the country as Miss Harriet Hartwell. I told him that her father had given her a hundred pounds to make her preparations, and then I ventured to say that there were very nice things to be had in Exeter.

“Upon my word, though he certainly is a very well-looking old man, he has a most disagreeable expression of countenance when he means to be high and mighty. He laughed, or rather sneered a little when I mentioned poor Exeter, which is, however, our highly-prized metropolis of the west, and said, ‘I beg your pardon, my dear good lady, but you must not talk of Exeter to persons of my—that is, I mean to persons who have London, or even Bath, within their reach. I will take care that my fair bride’s wardrobe shall be everything that it ought to be. But I must request you to take my word for it, till such time, at least, as Harriet can make her own report, for, of course, you know it would be sad folly to have packing-cases innumerable sent down to Penmorris, merely for the purpose of having them sent away again. And as to the hundred pounds, dear Mrs. Hartwell—do, pray, tell the

sweet creature that she is to consider it merely as a present of pocket-money from her papa, and that she may spend it in giving some little keepsake to her sister.' Now, of course, my dear Margaret, I am quite aware that all this is very generous, but, nevertheless, I should have been better pleased if he had not said a word on the subject. But I dare say you will call me captious and unreasonable. As to Mary's accompanying them on their wedding tour, my anxieties on the subject of dress on that score were speedily removed, for my venerable son-in-law very soon made it perfectly clear, to the meanest capacity, that he had no intention that his bride should have any female companion beside the waiting-woman with whom he has provided her; and all this, or at least as much of it as it was necessary for Harriet to know, has been converted by our dear, good Mary, into so many positive proofs of her future brother's love and tenderness for his youthful bride. On the subject of the jaunt, however, which my old-fashioned notions had made me anticipate for her, it is very plainly to be seen that she is greatly relieved by finding that I was mistaken. When I first spoke to her of it, which I did as of an event that was absolutely inevitable, she listened with an air that was certainly rather docile than joyous: but when I observed to her that I suspected Mr. Cuthbert had no intention of proposing this jaunt to her, her joy was too genuine to be concealed. Perhaps, all things considered, there is nothing very extraordinary at her being well pleased to be left at home; but nevertheless, it is a painful proof of the every-way wide separation which the approaching event will make between the two sisters.

"I will add a line when it is over—till then, adieu!"

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During the short interval which elapsed between writing the part already given of Mrs. Hartwell's letter to her friend, and the conclusion of it, a trifling event occurred, which, though of no great importance to the narrative, may assist in enabling the reader to understand the real state of mind of the young girl who is about to figure before him as a bride.

Although Harriet had by no means so tender an affection for the shrubbery seat as her sister Mary, she did sometimes enjoy an idle half hour of solitary musing there; and she did so, naturally enough perhaps, on the afternoon of the day preceding that fixed for her wedding.

Mr. Cuthbert, who had now taken up his quarters, not at the Osterly Arms, but at the King's Head, had, as usual, breakfasted at the Vicarage, and had whiled away about four hours afterwards, partly in telling Harriet how very beautiful he thought her; partly in giving her a few hints respecting various im-

portant matters of fashionable etiquette, with which it was quite necessary she should become familiar before he placed her at the head of his table in Cavendish Square; and partly in displaying before her dazzled eyes a splendid set of emeralds just arrived from his London jewellers, and which he said he had decided upon in preference to any other stones, on account of the remarkable fairness of her skin.

"As to your diamonds, fairest!" he added, with a very impassioned glance—"as to your diamonds, they are, of course, in my 'coffre fort,' at my bankers; and we must take care to get them newly set in time for the birth-day ball next January. But these emeralds will do, meanwhile, on occasions of less important display; and these, my love, are your own. My family diamonds, of course, are an heirloom."

All this was very charming, very flattering, very delightful; but the spirits will sometimes get exhausted under the most pleasurable emotions, and a feeling of weariness will occasionally succeed the most animated delight; and thus it was with the beautiful bride-elect. It would be very unjust to say that she had not spent a very happy morning, and quite as absurd as unjust, for she was herself persuaded that she had never been so happy before in the whole course of her life.

But though it had appeared very happy, it certainly had also appeared rather long; and when Mr. Cuthbert had at length taken his leave, in order to retire to his inn that he might dress for dinner, it was not without a feeling of very considerable enjoyment that Harriet, when she was sure he was quite out of sight, ran, without bonnet or shawl, into the garden, and betook herself to the bench in the shrubbery.

The air had all the sweet and gentle freshness of summer, and as it caressed, rather than disturbed, the bright tresses of Harriet's curly hair, she welcomed it with a smiling, upturned face, and murmured thankfully, "This breeze is delicious! I thought I was going to have a head ache, but now I shall be quite well again by dinner-time."

And then she seated herself in Mary's own particular place, where the stem of a fine old laurel tree furnished a convenient support for the head; and Harriet had not taken possession of it three minutes before she closed her eyes, and was as near as possible falling into a profound sleep.

But ere this result of her long love-making had actually occurred, she was effectually roused by a hurried step which approached her from the church-yard. She started, opened her eyes, and beheld a person who was certainly as far from her thoughts as she believed him to be from the neighbourhood.

This unexpected visitor was Charles Marshdale, the youngest

son of their friendly neighbour, whose family has been already described. Not only was the suddenness of his appearance sufficient to startle her, but the manner of it was calculated to increase this effect tenfold. He had been, as we have stated, recently ordained, but his dress had no trace of clerical costume, consisting of a sort of shooting jacket, long gaiters, and thick shoes. I believe it has not been mentioned that this young man was favoured by nature with an exterior of more than ordinary comeliness; indeed, he might be, and in fact was, considered as remarkably handsome; tall and perfectly well made, he might have been chosen as a model by a statuary, if not as an Apollo, at least as a hunter in such a group as our Gibson has added to the marble treasures of the world; nor was his face less strikingly handsome than his form; his almost black hair curled naturally, and so resolutely, as to defy any attempt to conquer it: his eyes were of that dark violet hue which is not unfrequently found with the very darkest hair, and the thick long lashes, which, by their contrast with a somewhat pale complexion, made one of the most striking features of his fine countenance, were profoundly black. In those days, the colour of the beard was a matter of much less importance than it is at present. *Favori*, moustache, and imperial were unknown, or, at any rate, known only by means of pictures and historical records, and looked back upon as the ludicrous traces of departed barbarism. Had it been otherwise, had the 'renaissance' of beards been about a quarter of a century earlier, Charles Marshdale's would have been considered as still more pre-eminently handsome, perhaps; but if fashion permitted him not to cherish his coal-black beard, it was some atonement that his peculiarly well-formed mouth was suffered to be visible, an advantage which the conquerors of our day are obliged to forego, for Greek lips curl in vain behind a thicket of hair.

Altogether, in short, Charles Marshdale was an extremely handsome young man, and, moreover, had very decidedly the appearance and bearing of a gentleman, although Mrs. Osterly's adhesive epithet of 'farmer,' bestowed upon his father, had blinded other eyes besides those of Harriet Hartwell to the fact.

The sudden appearance of this youth might well have startled the half-dozing beauty, even had it come upon her more quietly, for she believed him to be at Oxford, where he had recently obtained a fellowship; but, instead of coming quietly, he really rushed upon her like a whirlwind, and, before he had taken time enough to perceive that her eyes were closed, he exclaimed, in a voice that was both hoarse and harsh, "Harriet Hartwell!—let me ask you one question—only one! And you must answer

it ; for from yourself alone will I accept an answer ! Is the report true which says that you are on the eve of marriage with a cousin of Mrs. Osterly's ?”

“ Good gracious, Charles Marshdale ! How can you dare to frighten me so ?” she exclaimed. “ What right can you possibly have to ask me such an impertinent question in any way ? —To say nothing of your shocking manner, which is really enough to frighten one to death !”

He looked at her in silence for a moment, and then, in a voice as gentle as it had before been the reverse, said, “ My right, Harriet, will not be acknowledged by you, for I only can feel its authority. It consists in the fact—the well-known fact—that I love you !”

“ Well-known !—the well-known fact ? Upon my word, Mr. Charles Marshdale, I wonder how you can dare to come here, and say any such thing to me !”

“ You do not look at me, Harriet ! You will not look at me ! Might I not borrow your word, and say you ‘ dare ’ not look at me ? I doubt—even now I doubt—whether you could look at me and say that you did not know I loved you.”

“ And pray, what right have I ever had to know any such thing ?” replied Harriet, with a toss of the head, but still without looking at him.

“ Right, or no right, Harriet, you did know it—you do know it ! And if you do not also know, you have guessed, why it was that I trusted to the confession which your now altered eye once gave me, oh ! more than once, Harriet—much oftener than once !—instead of boldly asking more, while I was still without the power of saying to your father that if he would give you to me as my wife I had wherewithal to maintain you.”

A bright blush mounted to the very temples of the bride-elect, and she remained silent.

“ Speak, Harriet !” said the young man, while a feeling of indignation again changed his voice from mild to stern—“ speak ! I feel that I have a right to bid you !”

“ Right ! Do you talk of right again ? You have no right, sir, to talk to me in this manner,” replied Harriet, not only turning her eyes but her whole person away from him, as completely as the form of the bench on which she was seated would permit.

“ Oh, not in anger, dearest—loveliest Harriet ! Do not let me see you, look upon you, for the last time, in anger ! Pity me, Harriet—for one short moment pity me, for I am very wretched !”

The unfortunate young man now dropped on his knees before her, seized her hand, which she really had no strength to withdraw, and passionately glued his lips to it for a moment.

That moment passed, he sprang upon his feet again, and with steps still more rapid than those which had brought him, rushed back to the churchyard-gate, vehemently pushed it open before him, and was concealed in the thick copse which flanked the enclosure to the north, before Harriet, agitated and trembling with a multitude of conflicting feelings, felt quite surely, and quite safely, that she was alone.

And when she was quite sure of it—when the terror which had seized upon her, lest somebody, anybody, should pass by and see the agony of the unhappy boy she had so roughly chidden from her, had passed away, how did she feel then?

During the one moment that he had knelt before her she did suffer her eyes to fall upon him, and then, for the last time, his eyes once more met those of Harriet Hartwell. And then it was, and for his honour be it spoken, that he sprang up, and left her, for the suffering he read in them created more of pity than of hope.

A coarser-minded man might have felt differently, but the first words with which Harriet had replied to his passionate appeal, the first accent of her voice, had sufficed to answer the question which she denied his right to ask; and so answered it, that no lingering weakness which he might read in her eyes could tempt him to prolong the interview. And how did she feel when he was gone? Her hands were wet with the tears he had shed, as he pressed his lips upon them. And strange—~~was~~, most strange!—she found that her own eyes were shedding tears also! She felt, poor girl, a guilty pang at her heart that almost choked her, and actually wrung her hands with a feeling of deeper remorse than consciences less pure accord to much graver faults.

Perhaps a short extract from the pages which she added that night to her journal may be the best medium for displaying what her state of mind really was:—

“Penmorris Vicarage, July 20th, 1811.

“The last day of my living in it as my home!

* * * * *

“How very glad I am that I did not yield to the temptation which beset me so strongly when I came in from the garden to-day! How very glad I am that I had the resolution to dress myself and go down to dinner, instead of saying I was ill, and going to bed, as I so greatly longed to do! Good gracious! how do I know what might have happened if I had been silly enough to yield to the temptation? How could I have said that I was too ill to dine at table on Monday, but expected to be well enough to be married on Tuesday? And for how much, I wonder, would I have consented to have had everything

changed, and put off? If it had been, it never would have come on again, most likely; for who can say what might have happened? And how can such a young and very silly girl as I am pretend to answer for herself, if anything more of the same terrible kind should happen that did this morning? And, mercy on me! what a horrid condition I should have been in if everything had gone off! To fancy the triumph of Mrs. Osterly, the sneers of Miss Shriffly, and the ill-natured jokes of everybody in the world that knows me! And what good would have come of it? For, after all, I don't think that poor Charles can love me so very much as he fancies he does, now that he has just heard I am going to be married. That is what put it so violently in his head, I am quite sure of it. As to his telling me in such an angry manner that I knew all about it before, it is not at all fair of him; for how should I know it? Certainly, I suspected (but he has no right to say I knew it), I certainly did suspect that he liked me better than he did Mary, or any other of the girls in the neighbourhood, but that is no proof that he has a right to say what he did say. And as to my behaviour, I don't think I ever did or said anything that could deserve his reproaches. As to one's eyes, it is quite absurd to talk such nonsense. How can any one tell how their eyes look?—But it is folly to write any more about it, and of course it will be worse than folly—it will be very great wickedness—to think any more about it after to-morrow. I hope God will forgive me if I have been wicked already, and forgive me, too, if it is a sin to wish that poor Charles Marshdale may be very, very happy! If I do make up my mind, as I intend to do, never to think of him at all after to-morrow, I hope that my past thoughts may go for nothing.”

CHAPTER XIII.

TUESDAY, 29th July, 1811, was as bright a day as ever that comet-cheered year could boast; but yet it was not bright enough to enliven all whom it shone upon—for even the happy bridegroom looked stately and grave, and the lovely bride was certainly rather paler than usual, though all the people who came to the church-door to look at her, which comprehended nearly the whole parish of Penmorris, declared that they had never seen her look one quarter so lovely before. It might be that her beautiful white silk dress, and the snow-like chip bonnet, with its lily flowers, and delicate lace veil, contributed a little towards producing the effect they admired. Such, decidedly, was the impression which her pretty dress produced

upon herself. She, too, thought that she had never looked so beautiful before ; and perhaps she never had. There was a sort of refined, and almost dignified regularity of feature in Harriet, which accorded well with the elegance of her attire upon this occasion ; and she certainly thought, as she looked at herself, that the husband upon whom she was about to bestow her hand was the only person she had ever known who had the power of placing her in the station for which she was best fitted by nature and inclination.

And the sight of her maid's genteel-looking figure, as she caught sight of it beside her own in the mirror, confirmed this idea, even more, perhaps, than the rich softness of the Brussels lace veil, which had been the last of her bridegroom's splendid presents to her. When a young girl is putting on the wedding-ropes in which she is to meet the man she loves, at the altar, there is a vehemence of agitation throbbing at her heart, which pretty effectually prevents her at that moment, let her be as vain as she may, from thinking very much about her finery. But the affection of Harriet Hartwell for her bridegroom was not exactly of this kind ; and though, in the very inmost recesses of her heart, she most truly believed herself excessively attached to him, she was nevertheless sufficiently in possession of her faculties to feel very glad indeed that she was going to be married to a gentleman who could not only dress her as a lady ought to be dressed, but could give her such rank and station as she knew she should like to hold, and such as she really believed she was well fitted by nature to fill ; and, as the contemplation of herself and her maid generated these pleasant thoughts, the far less pleasant idea of Charles Marshdale and his tears faded from her mind, and only returned for an instant, when, on hearing the sound of wheels before the door of the house, she looked out and saw the elegant travelling carriage in which she was to be conveyed from her humble home, and the two smart serving men who were engaged in carrying out her imperial,—etcetera, to place upon it. And then she did again remember him for one short moment, but it was only to rejoice that nothing had ever happened to blight the prospect that was now opening before her. "What a different thing it would be, to be sure !" thought she, "if at this moment I was trying on a new straw bonnet, in order to go to church and be married to the son of Farmer Marshdale !"

Harriet's only bridemaidee was her sister Mary. The names of several young acquaintances in the neighbourhood had been mentioned, but after one or two questions asked respecting them, by Mr. Cuthbert, Harriet very decidedly gave it as her opinion that it would be a great deal better not to think of having any other bridemaidee than her sister Mary.

And, accordingly, Mary was her only bridesmaid, and when the new abigail left the room, after placing the last pin in her mistress's dress, in order to superintend the packing of the carriage, the two sisters were left tête-à-tête—Mrs. Hartwell being busily engaged in seeing that the breakfast-table was everything that it ought to be.

That the two sisters loved each other as tenderly as ever cannot be doubted, yet, nevertheless, something like a shade of reserve had of late crept into their tête-à-têtes. Harriet knew quite well that Mary did not cordially approve her marrying a gentleman so greatly her senior; and Mary knew quite well, that whenever the time came that she should confess to Harriet the terms on which she stood with the son and successor of Farmer Marshdale, the communication would be received with great coldness, if not with positive displeasure.

And, besides this, Harriet felt shy, when longing to talk of the fashion and elegance of the style of life upon which she was about to enter, lest Mary might think she was making boastful comparisons between their respective conditions; and Mary felt shy, when longing to dilate upon the interest and happiness of agricultural life, lest Harriet might think that she was trying to depreciate the advantages with which her splendid marriage would surround her.

But all this reserve was completely forgotten during these few last precious moments of their youthful union. Mary's heart reproached her bitterly for having feared to trust the only secret she had, to the dear sister she was about to lose for ever, and whose gentle eyes now looked at her with such fond affection through the tears that dimmed them. And Harriet almost hated herself, as she remembered that her thoughts, during the last few weeks of her existence, had been too frivolous and vain to have been worthy the ear of her dear, precious Mary.

These thoughts caused the arms of both sisters to open, the moment the elegant Mrs. Selby closed the door of the room behind her, and they enclosed each other in what was decidedly the tenderest embrace in which they had ever been linked together.

When one, two, three kisses had been silently given and returned, Harriet, for the room was hers, led Mary to a little low chair, which had always been her seat by predilection, and, placing herself upon the bed, (beds were not too high to sit upon in those days,) said to her, in accents of the deepest, truest tenderness—"Oh! my Mary, I don't think I ever knew how very dearly I loved you, till now!"

"Alas, Harriet! I fear it is even so with me. My heart speaks like your heart," replied the sobbing Mary, "and I now

feel as if I had never made enough of you! Oh, Harriet! I have never trusted you, as I ought to have done, with all the secrets of my heart, and I now feel as if I should hate myself when you are gone, for not having told you everything while you were here. Listen to me for one moment, dearest! Mr. Thompson is not come yet. He is to come here and go with papa to the church before the ceremony, and therefore we are quite safe, for mamma told us that you were not to come down till the very last minute!’

“Oh, yes, Mary!—there is plenty of time. I am not at all in a hurry to go down,” replied the youthful bride. “But what is it, dear love, that you have got to tell me?” And a beautiful blush mounted to the cheeks of Harriet, who was fearing, she knew not exactly what, but that there might be something which Mr. Cuthbert would think very degrading.

“It is not much I have to tell,” replied Mary, out-blushing her sister. “As yet, indeed, it is in fact hardly anything; but I don’t like you should go, dearest Harriet, without knowing that, if my dear parents and his good father make no objection, Godfrey Marshdale and I hope, some day or other, to be man and wife.”

These words verified the very worst fears of Harriet, and it was really almost as much a feeling of duty as of selfishness which made her exclaim, “Oh! Mary! think well of what you are doing, before you make such a match as that!”

“I have thought well of it, Harriet,” replied Mary, gently.

“Oh, yes! of course you think you have. But you ought to see a great deal more of the world, Mary, before you can pretend to judge fairly whether it is better for a young lady to retain, or even improve, her rank in life when she marries, or to sink below it, in compliance with the feeling she calls love,” said Harriet, with great dignity. -

“But, my child,” returned Mary, half inclined to smile at the air of wisdom which Harriet’s beautiful face had assumed, “I do not perceive the least chance of my ever seeing enough of what you call the world, to make it at all likely that it should change the constancy of my affection for Godfrey Marshdale. I have loved him, Harriet, ever since we spent the week together at the Farm, the last holidays before he left Exeter school, and that is so long now that I don’t think I shall ever change.”

“Whatever will make you happiest, my dearest Mary, that is the fate I wish for you,” replied Harriet, with a very grave look, and a very solemn sigh. “But indeed and indeed, my dear girl,” she continued, “it is your duty, as well as your interest, to consider deeply what you are about, before you take

the very decisive step of speaking to papa of it. He is so very kind, Mary, that it would give him great pain, as you well know, to thwart any wish of yours, especially upon a subject so important. But think, my dear Mary—use your own good sense upon the question, and just think if such a tremendous difference between your situation in life and mine would not be painful to him?”

“I will promise you, dearest Harriet,” replied the elder sister, “that if I find it is so, I will sacrifice my own hopes of happiness rather than vex him, or my dear mother either. But here comes Mr. Thompson, dearest!—I am afraid the moment is come! I am afraid we must go down-stairs now; for Mr. Cuthbert has been here this half hour.”

Harriet changed colour very perceptibly.

“I cannot help it,” she replied. “I cannot, and will not, go into the parlour till I have seen my dear mother for a few moments alone. See where she is, Mary! I would go into her own room to wait for her, only I think it would make less fuss if she were to come to me here. Will you ask her?”

Mary waited not for a reply, but ran to find her mother, who accompanied her, without a moment's delay, to Harriet's room. The poor child, despite all her honours and glories, was weeping and very pale; but, on seeing her mother enter, she rose from her low chair and sprang to meet her. Mary stood at the open door, doubtful whether to enter or not, but the young bride settled the question by passing on, as soon as she had given her mother a kiss; and, impressing another on the fair brow of her sister, she gently, very gently, pushed her chair back and closed the door against her.

“Mary must not think it unkind of me, mother, if I want to have you, for one last little moment, to myself,” she said, returning to Mrs. Hartwell, and placing her in the favourite chair, “for when shall I have you again?”

“We must not yield ourselves just now to any such thoughts, my child,” returned her mother, struggling hard to set her a good example by speaking cheerfully. “No girl, beloved at home as you are, my dear Harriet, can possibly marry without causing and feeling sorrow by the separation which must follow; but your future prospects are bright with many hopes, and it would not be right in any of us to dwell upon the one gloomy point, and that one quite inevitable.”

“And I do not dwell upon it, mamma,” returned Harriet, earnestly. “If I did, I don't think I should ever get through this marriage business. I really do try, mamma, with all my might, to think of nothing but what is pleasant, and one part of my pleasant thoughts is owing to remembering that the wife of such a rich man as Mr. Cuthbert can never be prevented, by

fear of expense, from making a journey into Cornwall to see all that is dearest to her in the world."

And the beautiful bride, who was weeping despite all her efforts to prevent it, threw her arms round her mother's neck, and then, dropping on her knees before her, buried her face in her lap. For a minute or two, neither of them attempted to speak, and the poor mother's tears flowed very silently but very copiously down her cheeks. But after this short interval, which seemed yielded by both, as if by tacit agreement, to the true sorrow that wrung their hearts, Harriet roused herself, and, raising her sweet face, looked up at her mother with a smile that had a bright gleam of real pleasure in it.

"There is one thing, my dearest mother, that I have been intending to say to you ever since all those papers—those settlements, I mean—were talked about. Now you know, mamma, that it is quite impossible, and almost ridiculous to talk of, that I should ever be able to spend two hundred a-year for pin-money, which means, Mr. Cuthbert says, an allowance for clothes. What in the world should I do with it? Now, I want you to promise me, mamma, that if it should ever happen that you should like to have a little more money than was in papa's money drawer, you would send to me for it directly. Will you promise me this, my own dear mother? It will make me so very, very happy!"

"Yes, dear love! I will promise you," replied her mother, with a fond smile, followed by a long lingering kiss upon her fair brow—"I will, and I promise to do this, my Harriet, chiefly because I am quite sure I could do nothing likely to give you so much pleasure; but alas! sweet love, we must stay no longer talking here, as if there was nothing to be done. Mr. Cuthbert will have a right to think himself very ill-used if we keep him waiting any longer."

"And, indeed, I would not give him reason to think himself ill-used for the world!" returned Harriet, rising. "I am quite ready, dear mother!" she added, cheerfully, after arranging her curls, during a moment, before the glass. "Let us go down!"

And, arm in arm, they left the pretty little room, which had so long been Harriet's little kingdom, and the independent sovereignty of which had been a source of unceasing pride and pleasure to her for the last seven years of her life. She felt that this was the last moment during which she could ever call it hers, and as she passed the door, she lingered for a moment, and turned back her head to take a last glance at all her so lately-prized treasures.

Of all these, the little book-shelves, suspended by green ribbons from two stout nails in the wall, together with the thirty or forty miscellaneous volumes they contained, which she had been collecting from the age of five years old till a few

days before the first arrival of Mr. Cuthbert, were the most precious. All these books, excepting the elegant little Bible, which had been her father's gift on the day she was confirmed, she had given to Mary, and as she looked back upon them she felt an emotion of pleasure, from the thought that, whenever she paid a visit to Mary, she should be sure to see them.

And then there was the little writing-desk, a purchase of her own, upon which, at ten years old, she had very sagely expended a guinea, which her godfather, the very clergyman who was now come to perform the marriage service, had given her on her birth-day. It was upon this desk that she had written all her voluminous journalising, and she had felt so strong an inclination to take it with her, that nothing but Mary's having said that Mr. Cuthbert would laugh at her, had prevented her doing so. This desk she had desired might be given to Susan Marshdale—the directions for the donation having been given, however, before her parting scene with poor Charles, or probably they would never have been given at all. As her parting glance rested for a moment upon this desk, she suddenly remembered its destination, and a violent blush mounted to her cheek. "I wish I had never said anything about the desk!" thought she. "I hope Susan will never tell him it was mine; and more still do I hope that, whether she does or not, it will never be the means of making him think of me."

In the next moment, she entered the best parlour, supported on her mother's arm, and, fortunately, looking sufficiently beautiful to soothe into perfect good humour her dignified-looking bridegroom, whose features had certainly, the moment before, indicated some trifling discomposure at her delay.

He now stepped forward, however, to meet her, with a smiling and approving countenance, that made him look about a dozen years younger than he had done five minutes before; but, nevertheless, the crowd of rustic neighbours which surrounded the church-door to see the bridal party enter, failed not to exclaim, almost in chorus, after they had passed out of sight, "Well-a-day! what a pity it is that he should be so old, to be sure; and she such a beauty, and so terribly young!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE Mrs. Hartwell went to bed that night, she added the following passage to her letter to Miss Margaret Johnson:—

"The marriage has taken place, my dear friend; and I feel sure that you will join your wishes to mine for the happiness

of my dear child. But I have been so long in the habit of telling you everything, that I can't help telling you now, that my heart is heavy about her. It seems to me impossible that she can love a man old enough to be her grandfather! And if she has deceived herself, if she absolutely forgot the man, while remembering only his distinguished position, and the great compliment he has paid her, how sad will be her condition when she awakes from her dream of admiration and gratitude! As to the rest, everything went off very well; only the pew-opener, who was mother to one of Mrs. Ostlerly's housemaids, gave notice to the clerk, of her resignation the day before, and the new woman, who was appointed quite in a hurry, forgot to put any cushion before the altar-rail, for us to kneel upon. This made a very awkward delay, just at the moment when the ceremony ought to have begun; and I suppose it was that which increased poor Harriet's agitation so much, that she turned as pale as ashes; and I felt her arm, as she leant upon me, tremble violently.

"But all this seemed to go off when the ceremony began; and when it was over, and she turned round from the altar to take my arm again (which, however, her husband would not let her keep), a deep blush seemed to have fixed itself on her cheek, for I never saw her, for more than a minute together, with such a high colour. Almost all our poorer parishioners dressed themselves in their Sunday attire, and assembled in the church and churchyard; but the upper classes in no instance suffered their curiosity to conquer their politeness.

"Susan, indeed, says, that she is quite sure that she saw Charles Marshdale hiding himself behind one of the pillars; and that she thinks Harriet saw him too. But I am pretty sure she was mistaken—first, because I don't think one of the Marshdale family would creep in upon us in that way; secondly, because I dare say Harriet would have mentioned it, had she seen him; and, thirdly, because we have every reason to believe that the young man is at Oxford, where he is doing very well as a tutor at one of the colleges.

"I think you must remember the family, from having seen them so repeatedly when you were here.

"My dear, good husband dislikes this fine marriage, I fear, more than he chooses to confess even to me; but I, who know every tone of his voice and every turn of his eye, have no need that he should tell me in words when he is happy and when he is not.

"As to our dear Mary, her behaviour has been quite perfect. I know that in her heart she dislikes this marriage still more than I do; but from the hour that she knew it was to be, she has never spoken a word, or given a look, that could be dis-

pleasing to her sister. I own I have been a good deal surprised at Mr. Cuthbert's not having invited her to accompany her sister on her marriage tour, which would have shown her all the beautiful country between this place and the remotest part of North Wales, for they are to spend the honeymoon at Corwyn Castle, one of Mr. Cuthbert's many residences. But perhaps she may, after all, be happier at home; and for her father, and me the omission is certainly very fortunate, for it would have been a sad thing for us to part with both our daughters at once.

"Adieu, my dear Margaret! Let me hear from you soon; and believe me ever affectionately your friend,

"MARY HARTWELL."

During the whole time which intervened between Mr. Cuthbert's avowing his matrimonial projects to Mrs. Osterly, and the fulfilment of them in the manner that has been related, the lady of the manor had kept herself as strictly within the shelter of her own walls as if she had been besieged. She felt persuaded, and freely confessed this persuasion to Miss Shrifflly, that the sight of her own near blood relation exposing himself to the public eye as the lover and future husband of the vicar's daughter, would bring on a fit of apoplexy, from which she should never recover.

It was this feeling which prevented her appearance at church, and which induced her to abstain from her daily drive. It was in vain that Miss Shrifflly dwelt with the most anxious affection upon the probability, that such total absence of accustomed air and exercise, might produce effects equally hostile to her precious health; the old lady's constant reply to all such reasoning being delivered in the pithy words, "It's no such thing." And the old lady was right; nothing could be reasonably feared from the want of air and exercise, in any degree approaching the danger which might be accounted certain had she encountered the spectacle she dreaded.

This marriage was the severest blow her pride had ever received; and the disgrace falling upon her so completely at home made her sufferings from it greatly more vehement than they would have been, if this self-same cousin had married a tinker's daughter at the distance of five hundred miles from her dwelling.

Never was a self-worshipping, self-petting old woman more thoroughly annoyed. The visionary mitre, which Mr. Cuthbert had so ingeniously contrived to bring before her eyes, in the very act of dropping upon the head of Mr. Hartwell, was totally unable to heal the wounds made by the conversion of his daughter Harriet into a first cousin, before the eyes of the

whole parish of Penmorris ! If the vicar was ever really made a bishop, which she began to doubt, it might do something towards softening the disgrace in the opinion of her more distant and less familiar neighbours ; but in this particular instance, every labourer that tilled her lands seemed, by his vicinity, to be a more important witness of this disgrace than any person, even of the highest rank, could be at a distance.

When a hard-tempered, self-willed, human being, whether male or female, falls into such a paroxysm of anger as that from which the lady of the manor of Penmorris was now suffering, relief is generally sought for from some species of revenge ; and so it was with Mrs. Osterly. Could she have suddenly blighted the beauty of the bride, and doomed her preposterously-conceited cousin to carry about with him, for the rest of his life, a wife as remarkable for personal deformity as the one he had chosen was the reverse, she would probably have preferred it to any other mode of punishment ; but this was beyond her power, and she, therefore, like a sensible woman as she was, turned her thoughts towards what was practicable.

Some mention has been already made of another first-cousin of Mrs. Osterly's, a lady who had once been upon a visit at the Manor House, and had left behind her, when she quitted it, the reputation of great eccentricity. Some people, indeed, had not scrupled to say she was mad, but they were wrong ; Mrs. Maberly Montagu was not mad, but she had some very out-of-the-way notions, and sometimes affected to have more.

When, some eighteen or twenty years previously, Mrs. Osterly had invited' this cousin to visit her, she certainly did it with some notion of bequeathing her property to her.

Mr. Cuthbert was at that time too exquisitely elegant, and too perpetually engaged, to bestow much time or much thought upon his old-fashioned relative at Penmorris ; and his not having accepted an invitation to spend a certain Christmas with her had so disgusted the proud old lady, that she suddenly determined to punish him by leaving her acres elsewhere.

Miss Maberly Montagu was the only other near relative that she had in the world ; and as she had been recently left in notoriously narrow circumstances by the death of her aged father, whose half-pay as a general had died with him, it seemed probable, in the opinion of Mrs. Osterly, that the prospect of inheriting her house, and her park, and her manor, and her two thousand five hundred a-year, would make this cousin as obedient and respectful a companion as any she could have, and that she might, if she behaved herself properly, turn out quite as eligible an heir as Mr. Cuthbert himself.

The invitation was immediately accepted, and Mrs. Maberly Montagu, as, since the death of her father, she had thought

proper to call herself, arrived ; but she did not, according to Mrs. Osterly's ideas, behave herself properly.

Her first offence was the absolutely and steadfastly refusing the title of Miss, which she had given up. This Mrs., or Miss, Maberly Montagu was ten years younger than the lady of the manor, who thought it most preposterously absurd, that a single woman of forty should thus give up her claim to youth ; and many other offences followed after, which soon amounted to a sum total too great to bear ; and so Maberly Montagu left the Manor House exactly fifteen months after she entered it ; and retreated, upon the tiny income of three hundred a-year, to a pretty village in North Wales, where she had very quietly remained ever since.

Nevertheless, she did not feel disposed to reject her rich cousin's new invitation. For many years of her life this eccentric lady had spent a very unusual proportion of her time in the open air—wandering over the mountains, and passing whole hours upon their heathery sides, with no companions but a few antiquated volumes and her old dog. But this old dog was dead ; and, like some few other widowed ladies, she could not persuade herself to give him a successor, so that her walks had become much less pleasant than before ; besides, though she was still one of the most active walkers of threescore over known, she began to feel that she could no longer do quite so much in that way as she had done ; and she began to feel, likewise, that there was something very snug and comfortable in reading in the house, instead of on the hill-side.

And then it soon became evident to her, that as she read more, a great deal, when the operation was carried on in a house than when it was pursued on the hill, she wanted, and should want, more books than she could get.

The letter of Mrs. Osterly arrived at a moment when this new want was pressing rather painfully upon her ; and the first thought which entered her head upon reading the invitation was, that there was an excellent library at the Manor House.

"And even," thought she, "if I am sent off again, I shall at least carry away the recollection of what I may have read before I go."

And then the odd-tempered lady laughed as she recollected some of the queer tricks she used to play, when she last visited her fine cousin, in order to convince her that she was not sufficiently a fine lady to be taken out to the solemn visitings with which Mrs. Osterly at that time indulged the grandees of her neighbourhood.

"I am grown older and wiser now," said she half aloud—"and it is possible she may be so too ; and if so, perhaps we may do very well."

So the answer was in the affirmative, and Mrs. Montagu took up her abode for the second time at Penmorris Manor House, within two months after Mr. Cuthbert had been requested by his indignant cousin to take his departure from it for ever.

* * * * *

Harriet's first letter to the home she had left arrived six days after her departure ; and was as follows :—

“ MY DEAREST MOTHER,

“ It is to you that my first letter must be written, though, as you know, it has been settled that Mary and I are to be the regular correspondents, unfailing in punctuality, and as unlimited in detail as the post will permit. As to dear papa, I neither expect him to lay aside any sermon he may be composing, in order to write a gossiping letter to me, nor yet to consider the reading my long dispatches from beginning to end, as one of his paternal duties. He ought to be let in for as much of the correspondence on both sides as may suit his leisure and his pleasure, (dear, darling papa !) and not a bit more.

“ The weather was perfectly beautiful all day Tuesday, and I really enjoyed being driven along as fast as the horses could go. There certainly is a great pleasure in going fast, though I suppose it is rather childish to like it so much as I do, for I can't help thinking that there must have been a good deal of resemblance between the pleasure I felt, and that which I have seen the children enjoy in the merry-go-rounds at Bodley fair !

“ I did not think the country was so pretty the next day, nor was the weather so pleasant, for there was more wind, and that made Mr. Cuthbert think it better to have the windows up, which prevented my enjoying the pleasant sensation of cutting rapidly through the air ; and indeed I suffered a good deal from feeling that the carriage was very hot and close, but of course I did not say a word about it. But he says—Mr. Cuthbert, I mean, says—that when we are in London, he shall drive me about in an open carriage, which I am very glad of, for I can't bear that hot, stuffy feel that we had the day before yesterday.

“ I can't say that I think there is anything so beautiful in the country we are going through, though now we must have gone a great, great many miles. Perhaps my eyes have been spoiled by having such very beautiful country at home. Mary must never expect to see anything so lovely, or to like anything so well, as that green terrace-like hill above Mrs. Osterly's deer-park. I can't exactly say why it is that I think it so much more beautiful than anything I have seen on my journey ; but somehow or other the view looks brighter, and makes one feel gayer and happier than any other.

"My maid, Selby, tells me that she expects to be terrified out of her life at Corwyn Castle, because the men-servants tell her that it is haunted. The thought of seeing a ghost would interest me exceedingly, if I could believe it ; but you know what papa says about all such stories. And yet, if I remember rightly, he never quite said that such things were impossible, only that they were not likely to happen in our days. But many things that are only unlikely do happen, certainly ; and who knows whether a little ignorant young bride like me, being brought into the old family castle in such a very strange and unexpected manner, might not be a reason for some good spirit, that reigned as lady of the castle hundreds of years ago, to come and give a little advice ? But even if this might be possible for a young lady when she was quite alone, like some of the heroines we have read of, it would not be possible for me, because I shall not be alone. I wonder whether there would be any harm in asking leave. However, there is no use in talking about it now ; when we get to Corwyn we are to stay some time, Mr. Cuthbert says, and then, if there really is a regular ghost chamber, I may be able to manage it. Mr. Cuthbert has told me a hundred times over that I shall always have my own way in everything ; and if he keeps his promise, as I am sure I hope he will, you may depend upon it I will see a ghost at Corwyn, if there is one to be seen. I am quite sure I should not be afraid.

"Selby is really a very nice person ; I like her very much, she seems so watchful and attentive to me. It is not enough to say that I have no occasion to bid her do anything, because she always thinks of everything I can possibly want before hand ; but she finds out a great many things to do for me, that I should never have thought of wanting, but which, nevertheless, make me much more comfortable than I should be without them. I did not think I should ever be brought to consider a waiting-maid as so useful ; and yet I assure you I am beginning to feel already that I don't know what I should do without one ; or, perhaps, I ought rather to say without Selby, for I don't think I should ever like another so well. I believe that I should soon get to love her as if she was a real friend, and not a servant. Poor dear young woman ! she does seem so thoughtful and so full of kindness ! She seems to know everything I think and feel, without my telling her.

"I don't know, my dear mamma, whether you will consider this as a long letter, but I assure you it is a great deal longer than I expected to write when I began ; for I did not feel at all as if I had anything very particular to say. God bless you all three, my dear and dearest papa, mamma, and Mary ! I am

afraid I shall never be clever at writing ; for I don't feel that I write so pleasantly and so easily as I thought I should, when we talked in Mary's room all about the immensely long letters I was to send you. But you must not mind that ; for if I have not the faculty of writing long letters—which I rather fancy is the case—I am not the less likely to enjoy reading them, but quite the contrary, I think ; for if I took any particularly great pleasure in writing long letters, I should not have time to long—as I now do—to read them. Please don't forget that. Once more, God bless you all ! And believe me,

“Your ever devoted daughter and sister,
“HARRIET CUTHBERT.”

“P.S.—Please, dear mamma, to give the enclosed little morsel of paper that I have sealed up, to Mary. It is—at least just now—a little bit of a secret, but she will explain it all to you one of these days, you may depend upon it.”

This sealed up little morsel of paper contained the following words :—

“MY DEAREST MARY,

“Do you remember that when you told me about your having agreed with Godfrey Marshdale to tell papa and mamma, and also his father, about your liking one another, I begged and entreated you not to be in a hurry, because I thought it was so very likely that you would change your mind ? But I have been thinking a good deal about it since, and I believe you were right, and I was wrong. I think it would be much better, and more wise, in every way, that you should mention it—and the sooner the better, dearest Mary.

“Ever your own affectionate sister,
“HARRIET.”

This epistle had not, it must be confessed, much in it to call for any very interesting commentary, but for a minute or two after Mrs. Hartwell had finished reading aloud the part of it addressed to her, the whole trio were profoundly silent. The first words spoken were by Mr. Hartwell, and he said, in a voice that seemed to express some species of anxiety, “I hope that young woman, that Selby, is a well-principled girl. Poor dear Harriet ! She seems inclined to lean upon her very much !”

And then Mary, without saying anything in reply to this observation, appeared about to open the little sealed note which her mother had put into her hands, and which, though Harriet thought it much too small to occasion such a misfortune, had caused her letter to be charged double. But

before she had broken the wax she changed her mind, and instead of opening it, put it in her pocket.

The conversation which ensued, however, continued to be rather in a languid tone.

Mrs. Hartwell observed, that she did not suppose the country was very pretty between Penmorris and the Ferry of the New Passage, by which the travellers were to cross into the Principality.

And Mr. Hartwell remarked, that he believed ghosts furnished a very favourite subject of conversation among waiting-women.

And then Mary, thinking that they did not seem particularly to want her, quietly left the parlour, sought the sacred privacy of her own room, and there opened and read the little note addressed to herself. The contents delighted as much as they surprised her.

"But, no!" thought she; "I ought not to be surprised at it. Dear, precious Harriet! This is so like her! She has been thinking of what I said to her about Godfrey, and reproaches herself, I dare say, for having received it rather coldly. Nay, now we are parted, she may think, perhaps, that she received it unkindly. Dear—dear Harriet! I will follow your advice, and torment poor Godfrey no longer by my cowardly delays. Though, to be sure, the contrast between her match, and that which I hope, please Heaven! to make, has something startling in it."

In less than an hour after receiving this unexpected counsel from her sister, Mary Hartwell revealed to her father and mother the secret of Godfrey's love and her own. Like all other subjects capable of exciting both fear and hope, this secret had kept Mary's mind in a very vacillating state; but fear and hope had been very nearly balanced, till the splendid proposals of Mr. Cuthbert had frightened both the lovers into the belief that such a marriage for Harriet would increase all their difficulties a hundredfold. No man—not even Mr. Cuthbert himself—could be more aware than was poor Godfrey, of the striking contrast between such a son-in-law as Mr. Cuthbert, and such a son-in-law as himself; and even Mary, who saw him with much more partial eyes than he saw himself, shrank in trembling from the contemplation of this contrast.

Great, therefore—oh, very great!—was the relief which followed this dreaded disclosure. The first effect of her almost whispered confession was a simultaneous exclamation from both her parents, pretty nearly in the same words, and most completely in the same spirit.

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Hartwell, fervently.

"God be praised!" said the vicar, reverently.

"Oh, papa!—oh, mamma!" exclaimed poor Mary, almost doubting if she heard their words aright; "is it possible that you are really glad of it?"

"Quite possible, my dear love!" replied her father, returning her look of delighted astonishment with a very happy smile. "If our long-known and well-esteemed young neighbour, Godfrey Marshdale, does not turn out to have been playing the hypocrite all this time in a very marvellously perfect manner, we have a chance of having one son-in-law who will be to us all that our hearts can wish. But I must see Farmer Marshdale, as poor Harriet's illustrious cousin loves to call him, and talk over with him the important matter of how and when."

Mrs. Hartwell, while these words were spoken, pressed her happy daughter to her heart, in a way that daughters under such circumstances always understand to mean that their respective mothers intend to make the approaching solemnity as pretty, and as gay, and as every way delightful as possible.

The pleasure of Mr. Hartwell in the prospect of having his greatly-liked and highly-esteemed young neighbour as a son-in-law was much too genuine to permit of any unnecessary delay in seeking the interview with the young man's father, which was, of course, a most important step in the business.

But this step could not be taken till Godfrey had prepared him for it; and before this could be done, it was necessary that the lovers should meet, in order that Mary might report progress on her side, and that Godfrey might follow in the same excellent course on his.

Happy, indeed, was this meeting—not only sanctioned but arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell; and equally happy was that which followed it, in which Godfrey announced to his beloved and her parents, that his father was almost as much pleased by the prospects before him as he was himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE gray-haired but in no way infirm possessor of the flourishing acres known by the name of Five-Elms Farm, might, perhaps, from peculiar simplicity of his appearance, have justified, in the opinion of many, Mrs. Osterly's pertinacious appellation of "Farmer." His hair, which at an earlier period of life than usual had begun to change from black to gray, had, now that he was near sixty, become as white and almost as shining as silver. This silvery hair was kept cut

straight and even, at the distance of an inch above his eyebrows, producing a striking contrast to the originally fair but now sun-burnt and rubicund tint of his skin. His large well-opened blue eyes had a blended expression of gentleness and intellect that was irresistibly prepossessing to all who could find interest in the physiognomy of a rustic; his other features harmonized admirably with the before-mentioned eyes, so that, altogether, Farmer Marshdale was an extremely handsome old man.

But then he never, upon any occasion or under any circumstances, permitted a cravat to encumber his free-born, yeomanly throat. His waistcoat, which varied not during the lapse of half a century, was of striped velveteen, the only variation produced by the seasons being that it was occasionally laid aside in harvest-time. His coat might have boasted the self-same constancy of form and texture as his waistcoat, being ever and always a round-about, of the fabric known by the name of pepper-and-salt.

Such was the individual who received the promised visit of the vicar of Penmorris, which was if possible to settle the important questions of "how" and "when."

Mr. Hartwell, although very far from being a classical dandy, always looked like a clergyman and a gentleman, and, moreover, the shovel-hat, which in the days we speak of was not dismissed in places so near the Land's End as Penmorris, decidedly marked a dignified sort of distinction. Farmer Marshdale evidently felt this as he stretched out his hand to meet that of the vicar, which was extended towards him with a more than friendly, for it was an affectionate, smile.

"Is it possible," said the stout yeoman, looking earnestly at his visitor, "that the highly-connected vicar of Penmorris can come to Godfrey Marshdale, of Five-Elms, to hold talk of marriage between their children, with a smile on his face?"

"And why not, good neighbour?" returned the vicar. "Unless I see a frown on your brow while discussing the subject, you are not likely to see one on mine, I promise you."

"I thank Heaven, for hearing you say so, sir!" replied Mr. Marshdale, with solemnity; "for my son Godfrey would have been a blighted man had it been otherwise."

After this preface, the two worthy neighbours sat down together; and, before they parted, they contrived to convince each other not only that there was no rational objection to the match, but also that there was no rational objection to its taking place immediately, or, at least, with no more delay than might be necessary to provide comfortable quarters for the young couple.

On this point there had been, at the first opening of the dis-

cussion respecting it, a decided difference of opinion between the two elders: Mr. Hartwell being strongly of opinion that the Vicarage, from its superior size, would be more easily converted into the residence of two families than the house at Five-Elms, and Mr. Marshdale thinking the contrary.

"But, remember, my good sir," said the vicar, "that we have not only two very good parlours down-stairs, but the largest room in the house, as a guest-chamber, above, besides the two very comfortable apartments hitherto occupied by my daughters as their respective sleeping-rooms. So you see, my dear Marshdale, that gives us, quite independently of all that my wife and I want for ourselves, a sitting-room, sleeping-room, and nursery. What can you say against that?"

"Nothing, Mr. Hartwell. Your parsonage is an excellent parsonage, and long, very long, may you live to enjoy it! But do you not think that when two young people, like your Mary and my Godfrey, marry, they are apt, let preparation for them be never so carefully made, to have a notion that they could make it better, or at least more to their own fancy, after they have taken possession, than anybody in the world could do it for them before?"

"Very likely," replied Mr. Hartwell. "But what then? This spirit of improvement, my good friend, will be as likely to show itself in your house as in mine."

"More likely," returned Mr. Marshdale—"much more likely, because, obviously, there would be so much more to be done in order to make any rooms in my house as comfortable and nice-looking as yours are already. But, nevertheless, I still hold to my opinion that it would be wiser to let them take up their residence at the farm. For, in the first place, you know, Godfrey will be wanted there, early and late. And though the distance from the Vicarage is small, it is something. And then," continued the worthy agriculturist, very humbly, and almost, as it seemed, reluctantly, "and—then, you know, our little place, such as it is, is not very likely to change hands, and money well laid out there would be bringing them interest as long as they lived."

"Oh, oh, Mr. Landed Proprietor! you are there—are you?" said Mr. Hartwell, laughing. "And perfectly right! Beyond all question—perfectly right! So let it be, then, Marshdale. Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey, or the young farm people, as I suppose Harriet's cousin will call them, shall live with you. Mary is a good girl, and very fond of us, I believe, so I don't think she will forsake us entirely, though she is no longer to be an in-dweller with us."

Having come to a perfect agreement on this point, the two fathers began to discuss another—namely, what kind and

amount of alteration would be necessary at Five-Elms to make it a comfortable and convenient residence for Miss Hartwell. And here, again, it was the fate of the farmer, and not of the vicar, to dictate.

The bride's father opened this new topic by remarking that he did not think there would be any great change necessary. "If they should happen to have a large family by and by, my good friend, they have not got it now, at any rate; and as Mary will have half of my little patrimony, and of her mother's too, when we are gone, it might, perhaps, be more convenient to wait till it comes, before anything is done by way of building."

"Don't call me Farmer Wilful, instead of Farmer Marshdale," replied his companion, "if I differ from you altogether on this point, too. But I must, Mr. Vicar—I must, indeed, sir, for I can't avoid it, I see that plainly. I might spend every farthing of ready money that I have got in the world. All that I have been hoarding for Susan's fortune, from the day she was born—I might spend it all, Mr. Hartwell, in carpets and curtains and all the other furnishing finery we could any of us think of, and yet come short of making our house fit for Miss Mary's home, unless I was to turn myself and my other children out of it, and I won't say I should like to do that, even for her."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the vicar, with great sincerity.

"No, no, my kind friend—there is no occasion to talk about it. What we must do, Mr. Hartwell, is, to build a good comfortable addition to the old mansion, you and I don't know exactly how this can be best done, but we can find those who can tell us; and as to the cost, the fortune you have promised to Miss Mary will fully justify me in leaving a proper portion for Susan, charged upon the estate, and, if this be done, there is more than money enough at my command in the Bank of England to pay for all the building and all the furnishing that we shall any of us think necessary."

All this was much too reasonable to be contradicted by the vicar, and the fathers parted, if possible, with the mutual good-will which had ever existed between them increased, and, moreover, with the very agreeable conviction that they were each of them going to meet the beings they best loved, with tidings which could not fail of being welcome to them.

When Mary heard her father's tale, and learnt thereby not only that all obstacles of all kinds were removed, but that her union with her lover, which she had so lately looked upon as something too distant to be contemplated without quite as much of fear, lest it should never be reached, as of hope that happiness would be the result if it were reached at all,—when

she learnt that all distance and difficulty were completely annihilated, and moreover, that the respective parents were as heartily desirous that so it should be, as she and her lover could possibly be themselves, her first display of joy was manifested by a hearty flood of tears. They fell, however, quite in the April-shower style, and were so quickly succeeded by the more ordinary symptoms of happiness, that neither father nor mother had time to look either shocked or surprised, before she gave a glance so brim full of happiness to both that they enjoyed, from the long evening's conversation which followed, all the satisfaction and delight which their affectionate hearts had anticipated.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was something whimsical enough in the manner in which the two old ladies at the Manor House quietly set about ascertaining whether they should be better able to endure each other as companions for life than they had been when last they parted.

Neither of them mentioned to the other that she was then employed ; nevertheless, they both knew it perfectly well.

The result of this study seemed to be very tolerably satisfactory on both sides, and for this, as the reader is already aware, many good reasons might be assigned. The years which had passed in the interval, though they had certainly taken little or nothing from the eccentricity of Mrs. Montagu's character, had, at least, sufficiently sobered her animal spirits to enable her, without any very violent or painful effort, to resist her inclination to make a jest of many things which her solemn old cousin considered as the most important in life.

She felt, too, that there was something very comfortable in such a particularly good and well-furnished house as that belonging to Penmorris Manor ; and as to the library, she not only found it a much finer room than she had ever thought it before, but the comfort, not to say luxury, of having five thousand for the most part readable volumes within easy reach, made itself felt much more powerfully than when at least two-thirds of her waking hours were spent in wandering far and near over the country.

Neither was she insensible to the satisfaction of having a good breakfast, dinner, and supper placed before her at the properest times and seasons, without any attentive maid to trouble her, as her good Winifred was sure to do, by insisting upon it that she should tell her what she thought she should

best like to have for dinner. So that, altogether, there were great incitements to her now behaving well, and she did behave very well—so much so that Mrs. Osterly, on her side, thought that her cousin Montagu improved greatly as she grew older, and that if she did but go on she should not care about the idiotic folly of that distracted old Cuthbert a single farthing.

Miss Shriffly also was, fortunately, not only growing older, but wiser too every day she lived.

The time had been when she had boldly conceived and fondly cherished the idea, that if she did but profit by her constant opportunities, and manage to make herself more agreeable to Mrs. Osterly than anybody else in the whole world, there might be a capital good chance of her leaving all to her. Though the residence and the departure of the cousin Montagu had preceded her own arrival at the Manor House, the stories still remembered and told among the servants, as well as sundry biting allusions from Mrs. Osterly herself, had sufficed to convince the humble companion that the mere circumstance of cousinship was by no means the one thing needful to ensure the inheritance of Mrs. Osterly's estate.

But then came the cousin Cuthbert; and his welcome was such as greatly to shake this belief in the old lady's indifference to the ties of kindred; for although it was well known that this elegant gentleman had not scrupled repeatedly to refuse her invitations, he no sooner condescended to show himself than all his offences appeared to be forgotten, and nobody could for a moment entertain a doubt as to who was to be Mrs. Osterly's heir.

How short was the duration of this state of things has been shown already; but that which followed greatly tended to strengthen Miss Shriffly's theory respecting the decided advantage of being cousin to an estate, for it became very evident that, notwithstanding all the unaffectionate inuendoes which she had listened to from Mrs. Osterly respecting her "queer Welsh cousin," that same queer Welsh cousin would be preferred, as an heir, to all the most fascinating people in the world who were no cousins at all.

And, accordingly, there was no more folly on the part of the humble companion concerning her possible chance of becoming herself the lady of the manor, and, therefore, there were no plottings and plannings to set the two old ladies together by the ears, and the consequence of all this improved judgment on all sides was, that the three single ladies continued to live together very peaceably, although it might not have been easy to find three people of any sex, age, or condition, with a smaller stock of thoughts, feelings, and opinions amongst them, amidst which anything approaching to sympathy could be traced.

And yet there was at least one subject on which Mrs. Osterly scrupled not to dilate at great length, without putting the least restraint upon her feelings, and it was the subject, too, upon which she had less command of her temper than any upon which her thoughts had ever fixed themselves, from her earliest childhood to the present hour; which is saying a great deal for the degree of irritation which it caused her.

It need scarcely be stated that this subject was the marriage of Mr. Cuthbert with Harriet Hartwell; and the species of irritation which it produced was not of a nature to wear off.

She had always considered Mr. Cuthbert not only as the most proper, but as the only proper, person to whom she could bequeath her house and lands, and nothing but a strong feeling of indignation at what she had felt to be great personal rudeness and neglect on his part, had induced her to make her first experiment upon her cousin Montagu, with the view of converting her into an heiress. When this experiment failed, her renewed determination that Mr. Cuthbert should fill that place, and nobody else, had that sort of strength in it which is attributed to the junction of a broken bone; but, nevertheless, it had been, as we have seen, very violently snapped asunder, and the last fracture certainly appeared likely to be more enduring than the first.

This fact could not, under the circumstances in which Mrs. Osterly and Mrs. Montagu were now placed together, be reasonably considered as a misfortune by the latter. Nor was it; for Mrs. Montagu would have made little difficulty in confessing to anybody that she had strong hopes of inheriting the Penmorris property herself, and that she should this time be very sorry were she to be disappointed as she had been before.

Mrs. Osterly's sustained anger against the newly-married couple was therefore no misfortune to the cousin she had recalled; but it was a tremendous bore!

Constant use, however, will enable us to bear almost anything without wincing, especially if such wincing would be likely to make matters worse; and, accordingly, Mrs. Montagu, despite a sort of constitutional tendency to wilfulness in all matters which interfered with the peaceable enjoyment of her lifelong leisure, soon drilled herself into the power of listening to the unvaried themes of Mr. Cuthbert's apostasy to station and to race, and the "wretched girl's" insidious baseness in having thus seduced him, with the sort of steadfast resignation which might have befitted the disciple of a Cameronian Mentor. It may be doubted, indeed, if, after a few months' probation, she had not brought herself and her ears into a happy state of unconsciousness as to the purport of the monotonous grumblings that were addressed to her; and if she really

achieved this, she must be considered at this time as having been, upon the whole, extremely comfortable.

On one point, and on one point only, did she make any open and visible demonstration of intending to have her own way, and this was upon the question of going or not going to church.

Mrs. Osterly herself had never entered the sacred building since the Sunday before Mr. Cuthbert had avowed to her his intention of espousing Miss Harriet Hartwell. Towards her servants she had preserved a dignified and perhaps a somewhat haughty silence on the subject, intended perhaps to indicate that it was not her place to instruct them in the difference between a godly man and a man of God—a difference which she had condescended to point out to Miss Shrifflly with great distinctness, and which had produced, as of course she intended it should do, the effect of making that cautious little gentlewoman abstain from the danger which might have attended the listening to the word of God pronounced by the lips of a man who had suffered his daughter to marry her cousin.

With Mrs. Montagu she was naturally more condescending still. This lady arrived at the Manor House on a Thursday. The whole of Friday was suffered to pass without any allusion being made to Mr. Hartwell's recently displayed unfitness for performing the duties of his office in the parish church; but during the evening of Saturday the following conversation took place between the long-severed but now re-united cousins.

"All this business has been very dreadful to me, cousin Montagu," said Mrs. Osterly, as soon as the tea-things were removed; and though "this business," had not, strange to say, been alluded to for the last hour or two, there was nothing at all sudden or abrupt in her saying this, because there was no hour of the day or night at which she could have conceived it possible that the words, "this business," could have been pronounced in that house without every soul in it being aware that they alluded to the marriage of Mr. Cuthbert. "All this business has been very dreadful to me, cousin Montagu." Mrs. Montagu made no reply, save by a slight movement of her head, three times repeated, which brought her chin in contact with the little square-looking black bow which fastened the collar of her (always black) dress. But she had already taught her cousin to understand that this movement expressed her accordance with all she was saying.

"Very dreadful!" resumed Mrs. Osterly. "And it is not the least part of it, that it has made it impossible for me to go any longer to church."

"Oh! dear, dear, dear—I hope not!" returned Mrs. Mon-

tagu, raising her eyes from her knitting needles, and speaking very distinctly.

"Hope, not, cousin Montagu? And how could it do otherwise, I should like to know?" returned the lady of the manor, with a very awful frown. "You don't mean, I suppose, that you would have me go and sit in my family pew, and listen for two hours together to the voice of that abominable old man, daring to talk of heaven and holiness, when he has been behaving like an incarnate devil?"

"People think so differently, cousin Osterly, about what is right and what is wrong," replied her cousin, "that for a good many years past I have made up my mind to believe that it is the wisest way for everybody to do what they think right themselves, to the best of their own knowledge and belief, because then we could not have anything done that was really very wicked; and it would make an end, you know, of a great deal of disputing about what is right and what wrong, which must be a blessing any way. So I don't think it would be wise for you to ask, or for me to say, what I thought right about your going to church, to hear Mr. Hartwell read the prayers, and preach his sermon afterwards. I have got my own little notions about it, and I shall act in conformity to them. But I should be very unhappy if anybody were to try to make me tell other people what they ought to do. When I can manage to make myself do what I think right myself, my conscience is easy, and I can sleep as sound as a baby, after thinking it all over again in my head. But I would not have my mind burdened with the weight of other people's actions, or opinions either, for all the riches and glory of the world."

"Dear me, Cousin Montagu, you need not frighten yourself about any such thing here. I, for one, certainly don't mean to come to you or to any one else to tell me what I ought to do, or what I ought to leave undone. The very most you would have heard, if you would have had patience to let me go on, was a civil question whether you would want to have the carriage out on Sunday to take you down to church?"

"No, most certainly, Cousin Osterly, I shan't want that. The less servants have got to do on a Sunday, the more ready they will be to go to church themselves; and the more time they will have to obey God's orders, for that one day at least, instead of man's, by making the holy day a holiday."

"I don't know what on earth you are talking about, Cousin Montagu," said Mrs. Osterly, screwing her features into the sourest of all possible looks—"I was not thinking about the servants. They were hired to do their work, and, of course, if they do not do it when they are ordered they will be sent away, and others must be found who will. I don't like any-

body to make any observations on my servants—please to remember that ; not that I want to quarrel with you again—quite the contrary ; only don't begin talking to the coachman and footman any of your puzzling doctrine about holidays and holy days. The Bible never meant it to be the same thing, you may depend upon that. And now, then, to come back to what we were saying ; you do not mean to go to church on Sunday, you say."

"I beg pardon, Cousin Osterly ; but, indeed, I did not say that. I mean to go to church on Sunday ; I always do so, when I am not ill."

A short pause followed.

"Only," resumed Mrs. Montagu, "I had rather walk, than go in the carriage."

"Oh ! pray, ma'am, don't say any more about it. You cannot suppose that your going to church, or not going to church, can possibly make any difference to me."

And then the treddle table was set out, and the three ladies were happily, very happily, relieved, for a time, from all anxieties respecting their own affairs, by the intense interest they took in those of the kings, queens, and knaves, who had joined the company. But when the stipulated number of fish had been put in, and taken out of the pool, and the nicely-spread supper-table, such as still flourished near the Land's-End in the year 1811, received the trio, Mrs. Osterly said, after putting a particularly plump-looking wing of fricasseed chicken on the plate of her cousin, at the same time desiring the humble companion to give Mrs. Montagu some of the young-looking green peas, and, with an aspect that really seemed a little softened by the pleasant appearance of the objects before her, "What do you think, cousin, of a man who suffers it to be said that he is going to be made a bishop, in order to make it appear that he belonged, or was going to belong, to a higher class of society, when in reality he had no more chance of a mitre than the crop-eared horse that drags his old jaunting-car ? What do you think of such a man as that, cousin ?"

"I think he must be a very contemptible fellow, Cousin Osterly," was Mrs. Montagu's reply.

"I hope you do, my dear," returned the lady of the manor, with an odd little laugh, which was peculiarly her own. "I should be sorry that more than one of my cousins should approve such a trick. But you don't taste your wine ; our apothecary says, that my sherry is a finer medicine than any he has got in his shop, and I suspect he says no more than the truth. But tell me now, do you, who say that you always do what you think right—do you think it would be doing one's duty properly to go and hear such a man as that pray and preach ?"

"I would greatly prefer hearing both praying and preaching from a man incapable of such contemptible conduct!" was the reply.

"Well, then, my dear," returned Mrs. Osterly, with a triumphant slap of her right-hand palm upon the table—"well then, Cousin Montagu, you will not go to hear Mr. Hartwell, for he was the man that did it."

"I am very sorry to hear it, cousin," replied Mrs. Montagu, quietly; "it is many years since I saw him, and I do not remember having ever known very much about him; yet, somehow or other, he left a different sort of impression upon me. However, of course, if you heard him say that he expected such preferment, and you have learnt since that he really had no reason to expect it, I do not wonder at your feeling great contempt for him."

"And I have learnt since, and from the most unquestionable authority, that he never had the least reason to expect it. For the suspicion that it was a lie invented to delude me very soon came into my head—for I am not quite a fool, Cousin Montagu—and then I set about getting at the truth in good earnest, and discovered that, since the world began, there never was a more utterly unfounded falsehood. Can you wonder, then, that I am disgusted and angry?"

"No, indeed, cousin," said Mrs. Montagu, looking very much disgusted and angry herself. "Do tell me," she added, "if there is any other church within walking distance? I should not mind four miles to the church, and four back again, at all."

"Oh dear, no!" returned the lady of the manor, sharply, "there is no church at all within reach, but our own. Pray do not take any such wild nonsense into your head."

And again there was an interval of silence, which was broken at length by Mrs. Montagu, who said, "And you really heard Mr. Hartwell yourself, did you, cousin—you actually heard him say that he expected to be made a bishop?"

"What difference does that make, Mrs. Montagu? What possible difference can there be between hearing it said of him, or hearing it said by him? You don't mean to tell me, do you, that such a statement as that was ever made, unknown to the person whom it most concerned? Upon my word, you are too childish!"

It so happened, that just as Mrs. Osterly was uttering the concluding part of this speech, the eyes of Mrs. Montagu accidentally fixed themselves on an admirable portrait by Vandyck, which hung over the chimney-piece. This picture had been, during her former visit at the Manor House, the object of her highest admiration; and since her return she had seemed to gaze upon it with greater pleasure than ever.

A whimsical sort of question arose in her mind as she now looked at it, as to whether it would be wise to give up for ever the hope of possessing that picture, for the sake of indulging herself by telling Mrs. Osterly that she was both a fool and a knave for trying to bring Mr. Hartwell in guilty of nonsense evidently uttered by some other person, and the answer very deliberately rendered by her judgment to this question, declared that it was not.

And thereupon, Mrs. Montagu smiled good-humouredly, and replied, "Oh, dear!—yes, to be sure, that would be very silly indeed!"

Her course of conduct thus decided upon, and thus begun, vacillated no more. Mrs. Montagu never again contradicted anything that Mrs. Osterly said; but, on the other hand, she never pledged herself to do anything that she herself greatly disliked, or greatly disapproved; and so she went to church on the next, and on all following Sundays, without troubling either coachman, horses, or lady of the manor about it.

This constant attendance at church, almost inevitably led to a little civil intercourse between the sole occupant of the manor pew and the worthy vicar of the parish, which, though restrained to bows and curtsies at first, soon grew into something more natural, and more in accordance with the inclination of both parties; till at length Mrs. Montagu scrupled not to speak freely of the unfortunate and very unreasonable anger conceived by her cousin, against her young relative and all her family.

And then came kind inquiries about "Mrs. Cuthbert," and the expression of friendly hopes that some day or other they should be better acquainted, till by degrees the Hartwell family and Mrs. Montagu felt that they were near connections, and very sincerely good friends, though neither party ever dreamed of the possibility of meeting under the shelter of any roof save that of the church.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEANWHILE, the newly-married pair proceeded on their splendid progress towards the metropolis without accident of any kind, and reached it precisely on the day which Mr. Cuthbert had named as that of their arrival in Cavendish Square when the marriage tour was first sketched out, which makes it evident that the expedition had been prosperous.

The young bride had never once failed to write to her family at the appointed intervals, exactly and punctually, according

to the promise she had given them when the subject of their correspondence was discussed. But it certainly appeared that she was right when she said that she had not the faculty of writing long letters.

The one dated 'Corwyn Castle,' was the longest, and, in fact, the only one in which the spirit of Harriet seemed to be in real communion with those she addressed. In this letter she described the old edifice, in which, as it seemed, they had been received with a great deal of half-furnished grandeur and chilly stateliness, with the feeling of a young girl fresh from the perusal of Udolpho. It was very evident that she had been straining her faculties to the utmost in endeavouring to become terrified and romantically excited by the sight of mouldering draperies, and the sound of rattling windows and creaking doors.

In this very innocent attempt at amusing herself, it was very evident also that Selby had been an able and active assistant; and there were several sentences beginning with, "Selby came into my room just now, looking as pale as a ghost," and, "Selby assures me that all the servants, male as well as female, insist upon having an allowance for night-lamps added to their board wages, declaring that no one ever passed a night in a dark room in Corwyn Castle without repenting it," and the like. But in none of these little romances did it appear that Mr. Cuthbert had taken any part. Perhaps the reading of Harriet in this line had been sufficient to impress upon her memory the established fact that every lord of a haunted castle for the time being has a very particular objection to any allusion being made to the ghosts which are supposed to be attached to the premises.

Be this as it may, it is certain that Mr. Cuthbert's name did not appear in any of these little 'historiettes,' nor, to say the truth, did the young bride appear at all inclined to fall into the error, so common among newly-married ladies, of supposing that their bridegroom must of necessity be an object of interest to all the world.

Had her letters been a little more gossiping and gay, they might not perhaps have been the less agreeable to those to whom they were addressed, on account of this omission; but altogether, the effect produced by them was not exhilarating. One passage in her letter from Corwyn Castle may serve to show why some of the things which pleased her formerly, no longer pleased her so well now. "It is impossible to deny," she said, "that the scenery round this place is very beautiful. It is grander and more wild than any I have seen before, even in the finest parts of our own beautiful neighbourhood. But you would, none of you, find it easy to believe how perfectly impos-

sible it is for me to enjoy it in the manner I might have done formerly. In the first place, I do not possess a single pair of boots or shoes fit to take a real walk in. The very least bit of mud destroys those I have, and makes my poor feet feel most miserably uncomfortable. Nor is this my only misery when I set out, like Dr. Syntax, in pursuit of the picturesque. Yesterday morning, Mr. Cuthbert went, immediately after breakfast, to a farm at some distance, where there is something to be done about building or repairing a house, and the steward wished his master to see the place himself. So, as he ordered the dinner half an hour later than usual, I knew that I had a good long morning during which I might amuse myself as I liked, and I immediately made up my mind not to care about wet feet, but to take Selby, and set off upon a long exploring ramble.

"There is a beautiful, fine, wide terrace, with a wall, and a moat beyond, which goes almost all round the castle, and, having told Selby she was to go with me, I went out upon this terrace, that I might examine the country all round, in order to decide in which direction I should best like to go. The mountains, and the woods, looked most invitingly beautiful, look which way I would : but towards the west, which was still embellished by the morning sun (for Mr. Cuthbert had set off before breakfast), everything was seen to advantage, and in that direction I determined to go. But oh ! how you would have all laughed at me, could you have witnessed my subsequent adventures ! I had told Selby that she was to bring me whatever she could find among my things that was most fit to wear in taking a country walk, and having said this, I let her put upon me anything she liked, for I knew I should see nobody, and I never even looked in the glass, for I was reading mamma's dear letter over again. My bonnet was the very finest possible Leghorn, lined, and trimmed with pale lilac, and a long drooping plume of feathers of the same colour. The thing she put upon my shoulders, by way of a shawl, was of lilac silk, covered, as I afterwards discovered, with the finest lace ; my parasol was, I believe, made to match it, for that too was lilac, trimmed with a very delicate fringe ; and she put into my hands a pair of lemon-coloured gloves. Thus equipped, and positively unconscious how very expensively I was dressed, I sallied forth in great glee, and almost forgot that I was become that consequential personage, a married woman, while feeling that I might climb to the very top of the bold peak which rose before me, unless I felt weary of the exploit before it was accomplished. But climbing a Welsh mountain is not so easy a business as I fancied it. Before we had walked half a mile from the spot where the real ascent begins, all traces of a path

had disappeared ; but before this happened, we had already got into a copse of thick underwood, where we had to fight with bramble-brushes at every step. Selby ventured to remonstrate after we had walked some twenty paces beyond the termination of the path ; but I am sorry to say, I was very obstinate, or rather I was very happy—too happy, from the feeling of perfect liberty, I believe—to be at all reasonable. So I told her not to be a goose, and bounded on, leaving scraps of my cloak and my veil at every step, and really caring no more about it, than if I had been five years old. But at length the ascent grew steeper, and the wood thicker, and I began to get a little frightened at perceiving that the ground was in places very boggy, which I know is no good sign when you have lost your way upon the side of a mountain, and unfortunately I said so to Selby ; and then she began to cry, poor girl.

“ At first I laughed at her ; I really felt intoxicated with my freedom, and for many minutes went scrambling on, laughing like a fool, till I was stopped by something very like a groan from Selby, who was at a short distance behind me ; and when I went back to her I was really shocked to see how red and heated she looked, and how completely the neat dress in which she set out was destroyed. And then I looked at myself ! And seeing her tearful eyes fixed upon my bonnet, I took it off, and looked at that too ; and then, to confess the truth, I certainly did begin to feel a little ashamed of myself. I cannot attempt to describe my appearance ! Everything I had on seemed to be hanging about me in rags and tatters. But there was no good in making a fuss about it then ; besides, to say the truth, I thought of my pin-money, and did not care much about it. However, I did not laugh any more, for fear of vexing poor Selby, who was crying as if her heart would break ; but when I told her that she should have a better dress than the one she had spoiled, she appeared comforted, poor thing, and then she seemed almost ready to laugh herself, when I told her that I was ready to turn back, and go home with her.

“ But, alas ! this was more easily said than done ! And, perhaps, I had better stop here, and tell you no more, for even I could not find anything to laugh at, or to enjoy, in any way, afterwards.—But I will not stop either, for I seem at last to have got into the way of writing a long letter, and I will not cut it short in the middle. Well, then, to proceed. With our shoes soaked through and through, our petticoats splashed with mud, our gowns torn by the briers, and my fine lace hanging in fragments, we began to descend the mountain ; but, instead of coming out of the wood, as we expected, we soon found that we had mistaken the way, for, after wandering among the close trees three times as long as it had taken us to reach the place

where we had turned to go back, we still found ourselves surrounded by a thick wood, so thick that we could in no direction see half a dozen yards before us. And from that time our expedition really became very disagreeable, for it was both fatiguing and dangerous.

"With great fatigue, however, and after more than three hours of very painful walking, we reached the boundary of the wood at last, and then we perceived, with great joy, that there were buildings, which evidently belonged to a large farm, at no great distance from us. You will easily believe that we lost no time in reaching this shelter, where we hoped to find rest and refreshment, and at any rate a guide, if not the still greater blessing of some sort of vehicle to convey us home.

"Nor were we disappointed; nevertheless, by far the worst part of our misfortunes began exactly where we supposed they were all ended. Just guess, if you can, where my evil genius had led me? No! I will defy you to imagine anything so very, very unlucky! We walked towards the farm, and, we reached it in the condition I have already described. Then just fancy what I must have felt at seeing Mr. Cuthbert standing before the door of the farm-house, and after looking at us with an incredulous eye for a minute or two, at last suddenly start forward to meet us! I really believe, that if at that moment the choice had been given me, I should have preferred sinking into the earth to remaining on its surface. It was so very, very silly, you know, the first moment he had ever left me since we were married, for me to set off, and run wild over the country in that manner!

"However, by the very luckiest chance in the world, Mr. Cuthbert, and it was very kind of him, took it into his head that I had set off upon that wild-goose chase in order to look for him. I hope that you will not any of you think that I was sly and wicked, for not telling him that he was mistaken. If he had asked whether that really was the cause of my coming out or not, of course I should have answered him truly, and confessed that it was not; but as he took it for granted, there would have been something as unkind to him, as to myself, in telling him that he was mistaken. I hope I was not wrong, but upon my word, at the moment, I felt as if I had no power to speak.

"He took me into the house—the carriage which had conveyed him thither was immediately prepared for me—the good people at the farm gave me some beautiful brown bread and butter, and milk, and I soon felt as if I was not tired at all. And then, to say truth, I began to feel rather uncomfortable about Mr. Cuthbert's mistake, but it was certainly too late then

to correct it, and I have ever since been endeavouring to convince myself that it was all for the best.

"Selby behaved remarkably well ; she seemed at the time as if she scarcely heard what Mr. Cuthbert said, and she has never alluded to the subject since. Mr. Cuthbert has laughed at me about it two or three times since, but always very good-humouredly. He says that the people here will think he has got a very jealous little wife. But luckily this notion only seems to amuse him, and I never saw him in better humour than since it happened."

* * * * *

On arriving in London, Mr. Cuthbert informed his young wife that she must not expect to see any of the wonders of the metropolis at that time, for that it was not the fashion to be in London in the month of August ; and that his only reason for bringing her there at all, was for the purpose of taking her to various shops, and bespeaking such a wardrobe as it would be necessary for her to find, on her return to London before Christmas.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE first announcement of the absolute necessity of seeing nothing on her arrival in that great magazine of wonders which hitherto she had rarely heard mentioned without a sigh at thinking how very unlikely it was that she should ever behold it, save in imagination—this first announcement caused a very disagreeable chill to her childlike hopes and expectations, and she could not help saying to her sole confidant, Selby, when undressing for bed on the night of her arrival, "What can Mr. Cuthbert mean, Selby, by saying there is not a soul in London? It seemed to me that we drove through a thick crowd every step of the way, from the moment we entered it."

"My master means, ma'am," replied Selby, with all the dignity which became her situation,—*"my master means, that there is no one in London of sufficient consequence for you, ma'am, to speak to ; and when that is the case, ladies and gentlemen of high fashion always say that there is not a soul in town. That is the words, ma'am, that is always used."*

"Nonsense, Selby!" replied the beautiful bride, with a frown. "Don't try to persuade me of any such absurdity. And do the fine ladies and gentlemen take away with them Westminster Abbey, and the Tower, and St. Paul's, and the British Museum, when they leave London?"

"No, ma'am, they don't take them away," replied Selby, rather solemnly.

"Then what should prevent my taking the carriage, and going to see them?" said poor Harriet, who was driven to call her maid to council from the impossibility she found of obtaining information on all such important matters from any one else.

Notwithstanding all Mr. Cuthbert's gallant devotion to her, she felt, though she did not quite confess it to herself, that she had not become at all more familiarly acquainted with him than she had been during the days of courtship at Penmorris. Nothing, indeed, could exceed his attention, both as related to her health, and her manners. On the first point, it must be confessed, that she did occasionally feel rather tired of his persevering, his almost incessant, inquiries; for, having always enjoyed remarkably good health, she had never been accustomed to all the tender doubts concerning it which her anxious husband now expressed. In short, she never walked across the room without his saying, "Pray do not fatigue yourself, my dear love! Not for the world would I have you make a single movement which could by possibility be detrimental to you!"

To a young girl of nineteen, who felt that she could quite as easily have jumped over the chairs as walk round them, this sort of tenderness, repeated as it was every time she attempted to move, was rather annoying.

She bore his lectures upon the graces a great deal better; and, though she rarely escaped for many minutes together, (during the hours when her husband bestowed himself upon her,) from being tenderly entreated to do or to say something that she was either doing or saying, differently, she always listened to his instructions not only with the most perfect good humour, but often with a feeling of thankfulness, so perfectly conscious was she of her own ignorance upon all questions of elegance and fashion.

But, notwithstanding her dutiful submission on most points, she certainly did in private feel a little inclined to be restive, had such a thing been possible, under the solemn assurances of both her husband and her abigail, that her going to see the sights of London was something vastly too vulgar to be thought of. The master and the maid, however, agreed on this point most completely.

Selby, indeed, confined herself to a plain statement of facts—assuring her mistress that no one in the whole world had ever heard of such a thing as a lady of first-rate fashion having a house of her own in Cavendish Square, ordering her carriage to take her to St. Paul's and the Tower of London.

But it was not so with Mr. Cuthbert. He dilated a good deal

on the unfortunate propensities of persons bred in the country, much in the tone of a sportsman criticising the inclination so often manifested by a half-bred dog, for running in upon game. And though these animadversions were all uttered very caressingly, they were not worded with any very great attention to politeness.

Harriet, however, bore it all rather better, perhaps, than might have been expected, considering that she had never been much found fault with at home; but, to say truth, she consoled herself a good deal by thinking that it was almost impossible but that she must, some day or other, find an opportunity of going out of her fine house incognito, and seeing some of the marvels of which she had heard so much. Perhaps, she remembered her ramble up the mountain at Corwyn, and thought that, if equally favoured by circumstances, she might contrive an escapade of the same kind to the Tower of London, without equal danger of losing herself. At any rate, there would be little danger of having her dress torn to pieces by brambles, and none at all of encountering Mr. Cuthbert in a region which was so very nearly *terra incognita* to a man of fashion.

A very short time, however, sufficed to chase the misty images of the Tower of London, and the Abbey, and St. Paul's, and the Monument, &c., from the mind of Mrs. Cuthbert, and to occupy the place they filled by objects of a very different nature.

Little did the unsophisticated Harriet anticipate the extreme gratification, of many kinds, which was preparing for her; and with which the above-mentioned venerable objects of curiosity had no more connection than the man in the moon. Little did she guess the delight of being taken to all the most celebrated shops in London (even in August); and of being requested to select all that she saw amidst the rich and rare collections spread before her, which best pleased her fancy and most gratified her taste! From magazines of satins, velvets, and laces, she was conveyed to a region which seemed to her to be a mine of polished diamonds; and whatever was most exquisitely elegant in form and arrangement, was selected for the models upon which were to be set the gems which were to sparkle upon her own fair arms and bosom.

A heroine of the first order of fine minds would certainly have not been so susceptible of this species of pleasure as was the innocent, ignorant, and very youthful Mrs. Cuthbert; but to her eyes, and to her feelings, everything was so very new and so very beautiful, that for a few days her judgment seemed absolutely bewildered, and she fancied herself very like some princess in a fairy tale, who suddenly finds herself awakened

from a long sleep, and mistress of all the riches and glory of a newly-discovered kingdom.

Had poor little Harry's head been less completely turned by the enchantment of all this novel splendour, she might have been more awake to the somewhat ludicrous manner in which her generous bridegroom displayed his tenderness for her health and his admiration for her beauty, before the eyes of every shopman and shopwoman they encountered.

But as it was, she positively saw nothing but the pretty things which were displayed before her, and which certainly dazzled her eyes, if they did not captivate her heart.

This childish sort of delirium, however, did not last very long; the fine things were seen and admired; very liberal orders were given; obsequious obedience promised; and then she was driven home very tired, and generally begged leave to go very early to bed.

But this was only the beginning of the enchantments which wealth had in store for her. On the following morning, during breakfast, Mr. Cuthbert addressed her as follows:—

“My dearest love! we have a great deal more business to do; but before we set about it, you must tell me exactly how you feel. Do you think you were in any degree over-fatigued by what you did yesterday?”

“Oh dear, no!” replied Harriet, very gaily. “I never slept better in my life; and I don't feel the least bit tired to-day.”

“Do not say least bit, my sweet love!—not at all tired is the proper phrase. But tell me once more, before I explain to you what we have to do—tell me once more, if you are quite certain that all that driving and standing about yesterday, did you no harm? I almost doubt if you are yet aware how very precious your health is. Never lose sight of the fact, my love, that everything—remember, everything in the world—is, in my sight, of no importance when compared to your health at this particular time.

Harriet felt very heartily ashamed of herself for not being more grateful for so much kind solicitude; but comforted her conscience by thinking, that perhaps it was not so much any wickedness on her part, as the sort of indifference one always feels about sickness when one is very well; so she answered, in her usual happy tone, that she was perfectly well, and no more tired than if she had lain in bed all day long.

“Well then, my sweet love,” he replied, “if your fine, healthy constitution sustains you so admirably, I think there will be no objection to my letting you see the house.”

“Oh, no! my dear Mr. Cuthbert, I am quite sure that there can be no objection to that, for it is exactly what I have been longing for!” cried Harriet.

"Is it possible?" returned Mr. Cuthbert, looking greatly delighted—"is it possible that you have felt a longing for it?"

"Yes, indeed, it is quite possible, and quite true," replied the youthful Mrs. Cuthbert, pushing away from her, rather hastily, her not quite emptied tea-cup.

"You are not well, Harriet! I am quite sure of it!" exclaimed Mr. Cuthbert, hastily.

"Indeed! and indeed I am!" replied his laughing wife, suddenly rising from the table, "only I don't want to eat any more breakfast, and I do want to see the house, directly. That is what I am longing for most; for I am sure those great large doors that open upon the first landing-place must lead to something very beautiful."

"And you really feel a decided longing to see it?" said Mr. Cuthbert, rising also, and looking at her with great tenderness; "I will not delay it a moment—no, not for a single instant, my love!" and, applying himself to the bell, he rang it rather violently.

"Send the housekeeper here immediately, and tell her to bring the keys of the drawing-rooms," was the order given to the servant who answered it.

Mrs. Morris, the housekeeper, could scarcely have arrived more promptly had she been made fully aware of all her master's eagerness; and yet Mrs. Morris was a very stately personage; still, as she herself expressed it, "She knew her place."

The room in which they had breakfasted was the library, and a door at the bottom of it, near the windows, opened upon a small private staircase which led to a small door in the third drawing-room, which opened upon a conservatory constructed on the leads.

"Do you think this winding staircase will be too difficult for you, my love?" said Mr. Cuthbert, opening the door which concealed it.

"Difficult for me!" replied Harriet, laughing—"oh, dear no!" and she jumped towards the door, and seemed very much as if she meditated mounting three stairs at a time.

Mr. Cuthbert looked terrified.

"Mrs. Morris!" he exclaimed—"Mrs. Morris! pray make your lady understand that it is not right—that it is not desirable, I mean—for her to run up-stairs, and still less, I believe, for her to run down. Do, pray, make her understand this."

Mrs. Morris, though a dignified housekeeper, was by no means a cross old woman; and she looked into the beautiful face of her young mistress with a glance of kind and womanly interest. Mr. Cuthbert would have been exceedingly shocked had he chanced to see the sweet smile with which the glance was returned; but fortunately he did not see it; and, as it went far

towards obtaining for the almost orphaned bride a friend for life, it was altogether very fortunate.

"Perhaps I had better go before you, ma'am, to open the door?" said Mrs. Morris, very respectfully. "It is but a little private staircase this, and is very nearly dark, till the door at the top is opened."

This rational remonstrance checked the young lady in her progress, and pausing at the bottom of the stairs, while her guide preceded her, she said to Mr. Cuthbert, "What a very nice person the housekeeper is! I am quite sure I shall like her monstrously."

"Don't say monstrously, my sweet love," he replied; "and don't talk of liking your servants. You should approve them, sweetest, if they deserve it, but never talk about liking them!"

As these words were accompanied—as almost all his little lectures were—with a gentle pat upon her shoulder, and a caressing interference with the arrangement of her beautiful hair, she could only smile, nod her head, and say, "Thank you! I will try to remember."

But, nevertheless, poor child, she could not help being conscious, let her try to shake off the feeling as much as she would, that all this, coming so very very often as it did, was very tiresome, although extremely kind.

And now they mounted the dark stairs, and passed through the little door at the top of them; and doubtless Mr. Cuthbert was aware that it was by this obscure approach that his splendid drawing-rooms were seen to the greatest advantage; and doubtless, also, Mrs. Morris had received notice that they were to be ready for inspection, for all the windows of the three rooms were open, and the furniture uncovered.

Harriet was perfectly astonished, and almost dazzled by their unexpected splendour. Perhaps, the most remarkable features in the sumptuous decorations of these rooms were the number and unusually large size of the mirrors. Some very fine pictures, too, with frames as gorgeous as carving and gilding could make them, and well displayed upon walls hung with crimson satin, added greatly to the general effect. The chairs and sofas, more uniform than in our days, were also of crimson satin framed in gold, and the preparations for lighting were so skilful and so profuse, as to make it very evident that the owner of all this splendour by no means intended that it should remain unseen.

"Does it strike you as handsome, my love?" said Mr. Cuthbert, looking as self-satisfied as if he had painted all the chefs-d'œuvre that hung around him.

"Handsome!" exclaimed Harriet. "Mercy on me, Mr

Cuthbert ! it is the most beautiful sight I ever looked upon in all my life."

"Don't say mercy on me ! my sweet angel ; and do not call a fine suite of rooms a sight ! 'Heavens ! how exquisite !' or something of that sort, would be more pleasing to the ear. I am very glad, however, that you like the style ; and charmingly will you look, my fair queen, when you are receiving some of the best society in London here. No one will be able to say that, while fitting up my drawing-rooms, I failed in selecting the last finishing article—namely, a fair mistress to preside in them, with taste. Nobody can ever say that, my sweet love !"

This gallant speech was uttered, as he led her onward, his arm round her waist, to the last and largest of the rooms. It really was a very handsome apartment ; and the effect of the suite, terminating in the conservatory, as seen from this most distant point, was very striking. This conservatory occupied the whole side of the third drawing-room, being divided from it by four well-proportioned little Corinthian columns, the intervals between them being filled by plate-glass, unbroken by any visible frame-work, and so constructed as to run up like a sash-window, towards the roof of the little building, when it was intended to make the conservatory accessible.

Had Harriet (par l'impossible) not been pleased with all this, her sweet temper would have led her to appear so, to gratify the very obvious wish of her vain husband, that she should be enchanted ; but on this occasion the opportunity of displaying this sweet temper was lost, for it would have been very nearly impossible for her to appear more delighted than she really was. She felt as if she were in a dream, or walking in fairy-land, or reading the Arabian Nights, till her imagination had become too completely intoxicated to permit her knowing whether she were awake or asleep.

"The rooms are not half so beautiful as you are, my lovely angel," said her aged husband, who was watching her countenance with very evident satisfaction ; "but when you are receiving company here, my love, you must be most particularly careful not to give any one reason to suppose that you are at all thinking about your rooms, or that you perceive anything at all out of the common way in them. You will promise me this, wont you, my sweet love ?"

"I will promise to do all that you would wish, if it be possible !" replied Harriet, with a really happy smile, "but you must let me come into the rooms very often by myself first, or I shall scarcely be able to do what you wish. I never did, no never, see anything so like a fairy tale."

"My sweetest love ! do not talk about fairy tales, I beseech

you, when you are passing judgment upon what is elegant, costly, and fashionable. If any one tells you, by and by, when you are receiving here, that the rooms are beautiful, you may just say quietly, very quietly, 'Yes, I think they are well done. Mr. Cuthbert has a great deal of taste in that sort of thing.' Try to remember this, loveliest! Will you?"

"Yes, indeed, I will, Mr. Cuthbert!" she replied. "I will endeavour to remember everything you tell me. And besides, I know that it is not right or civil to boast of what we have got at home. Only in talking to you I thought I might just say what I really felt."

"To be sure you may, my beautiful angel!" replied her venerable bridegroom, suddenly kissing her. "Do not fancy I shall ever reproach you for that? No, sweetest! I am well aware, and have been so from the first hour of our acquaintance, what your feelings are towards me, and I delight in your fond love! Shall I ever forget the manner in which you ran after me at Corwyu! Never put any restraint upon yourself in that respect, my sweetest; for there is nothing in which you can indulge the feelings of your heart in a manner so perfectly satisfactory to me."

Poor little Harry blushed violently, and a sensation at her heart most painfully akin to self-reproach made her sigh most profoundly.

"Ah, I understand that sigh, my Harriet!" said the infatuated old gentleman. "Sighs are the natural language of love!" And from a movement of the arm which still encircled her waist, and which seemed drawing her more closely towards him, she anticipated another kiss, for the discreet housekeeper had retired, after witnessing the former one.

Poor Harriet felt at that moment as if she was one of the most detestable hypocrites upon earth. Yet with all her faults and follies, poor child, there never perhaps was a human being more perfectly free from this vice. The movement was quite involuntary with which she now disengaged herself, and, without at all thinking of what she was about, seated herself on a chair.

"You have over-fatigued yourself, my dearest love!" exclaimed her husband, with a look of violent alarm. "Sit still—sit perfectly still, exactly where you are, and I will order two of the men to carry you to your own room."

Poor Harriet's heart was not only an honest, but a merry one, and the idea of her being carried up-stairs by two footmen, when she felt that, if Mr. Cuthbert were quite out of sight, she should so very much like to play at leap-frog, by jumping over two stairs at a time from the bottom of the house to the top, struck her as being so droll, that all her sad thoughts about the sin of hypocrisy gave way before it, and, springing from the

chair with a much lighter heart than when she took possession of it, she said, with a gay laugh, "Indeed, and indeed, my dear Mr. Cuthbert, you are too kind and too careful of me ; I never was better in my life, and as to being tired, I really hardly know what the feeling is."

"Beautiful creature!" cried Mr. Cuthbert, looking at her in his most impassioned style ; "it really seems almost a pity that you should not always remain exactly as you are now ; but it cannot be !"

"No, certainly," replied Harriet, gaily—"that is quite impossible ! Everybody grows older and wiser too, I hope, every day."

"And will you, my sweet love, grow wise enough, without any further delay, to go up to your own quiet dressing-room and lie down upon the sofa for an hour or two ? I really am afraid that all this excitement may be too much for you."

This proposal was by far the most agreeable that the old husband could at that moment have made to the young wife, for that same quiet dressing-room appeared, in its way, to her fancy, scarcely less delightful than the fine drawing-rooms.

Her apartment was the same as had been occupied by all former Mrs. Cuthberts for many generations, but had been greatly improved and embellished for the reception of its present fair tenant. It consisted of a large bed-room, that occupied the space of the second drawing-room, which was immediately below it, and, as the house was a corner one, it had the advantage of being well lighted by the side windows. This ample and handsome room communicated by a door with the "quiet dressing-room," which, of course, occupied the space of the third drawing-room ; and, for the especial gratification of its present fair occupant, the windows and the glass roof of the conservatory below had been so arranged as to make the balcony of the dressing-room overlook the interior of the conservatory. This would have been pretty anywhere, but in London it was a real luxury.

While sitting on a sofa placed close beside this balcony, with no other companion than one of the many newly-published volumes with which her pretty book-shelves were furnished, Harriet, poor young thing, still felt that she had not been altogether wrong in thinking that she should like to marry a fine gentleman. And having thus indulged herself for an hour, she varied the pleasure by setting down her book and taking up her pen, and, under the influence of this pleasant feeling, wrote to her mother a full description of her beautiful London house, which gave great pleasure at the Vicarage, because it was written in a decidedly gayer tone than any of her former ones.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUT little time was lost at Five-Elms Farm, after the marriage between its heir and the eldest daughter of the Vicar of Penmorris was decided upon, before a master builder was sent for from Falmouth, to deliver his judgment upon the best mode of increasing the size of the mansion, so as to make it a suitable residence for the young bride and her hoped-for progeny.

Farmer Marshdale positively insisted upon it that the vicar, his lady, and their daughter Mary, should all be present at the consultation as to how many rooms were to be added, what was to be the size and shape of them, and in what manner they were to be appended to the original mansion.

It was a pretty picture that was formed by the consulting group, while all these points were under discussion, for there was something more or less picturesque about them all; but not to the eye only did this picture address itself—the moral part of it was the prettiest of all.

There stood the liberal-spirited, frank-hearted old farmer, sturdily insisting upon sundry little expensive comforts and embellishments, for the especial gratification of his future daughter-in-law, while the modest vicar gently and smilingly remonstrated against the extravagance, in vain.

And there was the active, clever, suggestive, and infinitely delighted Susan Marshdale, seconding her father's extravagance with all her power, while Mrs. Hartwell scolded her—as if she had still been the little pupil of former days, for bringing ruin and bankruptcy on the whole family.

As to the lovers, they speedily perceived that they were not at all wanted, and therefore, while the whole party were assembled on the grass-plot before the house, they quietly walked into the orchard behind it, and, when they got there, their conversation might have made it evident to any one who had chanced to overhear it, that the chief interest they either of them felt in the subject under discussion, arose from their anxiety that nothing should be finally settled upon, in the way of improvement and alteration, which would be likely to take much time in the execution.

They had both promised, with very dutiful alacrity, to agree to the postponement of their marriage, till Farmer Marshdale's house should be ready to receive them. But it seemed not to either that they infringed this promise, by whispering to each other that they thought the house was quite good enough already, and that a little paper and paint, with the addition of

a few articles of pretty, new furniture, was all that was necessary to make the house at Five-Elms quite perfect.

But this opinion, though formed, as they both felt firmly convinced, on the most rational grounds, could not, unfortunately, be insisted upon by the lovers, for whose dear sakes everybody was willing to do everything, save and except what they particularly desired.

So, after two or three private consultations upon the subject, held upon the bench in the shrubbery, the young couple philosophically made up their minds to submit to their fate, and listened with decent resignation to the judgment pronounced by the architect, after the plans had been finally settled—namely, that it was impossible the new part of the house could be made safely inhabitable in less than a year.

Now, Mary's apartments were to be altogether in the new part of the house, and the timely use of the little word safely produced an excellent effect upon the mind of Godfrey, rendering him perfectly docile and submissive under the delay.

This important business settled, Mrs. Hartwell, ever faithful to the friendship of her youth, thought it was high time to communicate this new piece of important family intelligence to her friend Miss Margaret Johnson, even though that usually faithful correspondent had as yet returned no answer to the letter which conveyed to her the news of Harriet's marriage. But now, as the good lady found both time and inclination to answer both in one, a short extract shall be given from this letter, to show the spirit in which she had received the two-fold intelligence.

The epistle began by rather an elaborate apology for not having written before; stating that the delay was occasioned by family business of peculiar importance. Miss Margaret then went on to say—"You must forgive me, my dear old friend, if I candidly tell you that I have not found myself in any very great degree surprised by the news contained in either of your two last letters. Believe me, my dear Mary, both the events they record, incongruous as they are, have been brought about by, and are the result of, one and the same cause. Our friendship would not have endured the wear and tear of so many years as it has done, had I not always, and ever, spoken to you with the voice of truth. I never have falsified my opinions, Mary, and I never will. The cause of which I speak, my poor friend—the cause of the strange anomaly in your family, produced by the marriage of one of your daughters to a gentleman of a fine estate, and highly connected, but old enough to be her grandfather, and that of the other, certainly more lamentable still, to the son of a farmer, for such, after all, is literally your own description of him—the cause, I say, is in

both the same—namely, the sort of systematic neglect of propriety, which seems, my poor dear friend, to have been your besetting sin through life!

“You showed it in your own marriage, Mary, and can you deny that you have shown it in that of both your children? Heaven forbid that I should ever be sinful enough to vaunt myself, or my own conduct, by way of an example. I am sure you know me well enough to be quite certain that I am incapable of having such a thought. But if not as an example, I may surely allude to myself as an illustration of the truth I wish to impress upon you, and which may perhaps, if duly communicated to your ill-matched daughters, so fructify in their young minds, as to be useful to them in their future conduct, in case they should become mothers.

“In the first place, my dear, I would ask you, why is it that I am single?

“But well and long as you have known me, my dear Mary, I doubt if you can answer this as fully as I can do myself. The reason is, because I would never, at any period of my life, extend a sufficient degree of encouragement to any of the gentlemen with whom I have associated to induce them to make me an offer of marriage. I am proud—very proud—to say that I never had an offer of marriage.

“Do not, however, mistake me, or suppose that I object upon principle to marriage, in general. Far from it. But I never, at any moment of my existence, lost sight of the sort of dignity which my connection with a lord-chancellor of England bestowed upon me, and the consequence of this has been that I am still single, because it has never been my chance to meet with any one whom I could consider, in all respects, deserving the honour of connection with a family so situated, in respect to alliance, as mine.

“It is the same protecting feeling, as I may call it, which has kept all my nieces single, for in their case, as in mine, it has never chanced that a proper match for either of them has come in their way.

“And is it possible, Mary, that any gentlewoman born can doubt that it would be far better for all the women in the world to remain single, than that they should marry men whose station in life could in any way be deemed objectionable? No, I venture to reply, it is impossible.”

The letter did not end here—but this is quite enough to serve as a specimen. And when it is stated that Mrs. Hartwell, having folded up the letter, gave it to her husband, with a gentle smile, saying, “Dear Margaret! She is indeed consistent, and ever the same—and, whether her theory be right or wrong, Henry, we ought at least to give her credit for being so

perfectly contented with her own destiny ; it may serve as a good specimen of her character also."

The vicar, however, was, as it seemed, rather less liberal, for, having read the letter, he said, "Are you quite sure, Mary, that she is perfectly contented?"

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The summer had given place to autumn, and the autumn was hastening rapidly on to make way for winter. Mr. Cuthbert, choosing that his bride's first introduction to the fashionable world should be in London, cautiously abstained from taking her either to Brighton, or any other of the favourite resting-places, where the fine folks, even then, were wont to pause after their summer flights, before taking up their abode in London for the winter ; which season, by the way, began, in the earlier part of the present century, several months sooner than it does now.

To avoid this, he led his young wife with him to visit all his various possessions, which, for some reason or other, had, at least, the good effect of making her look forward to the time when she should take possession of her elegant London home with great satisfaction. Perhaps, the recollection of her quiet dressing-room, which was to be wholly and entirely her own, might have had some share in this.

It would not be very easy to describe exactly what the state of her mind was, at this time, towards her husband. His admiration of her beauty, and his enthusiastic compliments to her on the subject, had certainly increased rather than diminished ; and so also had his display of wealth and elegance, as well as the profuse liberality which never permitted a day to pass without proving to her, in some way or other, that she was the object upon which it was his chief delight to bestow it all.

How came it, therefore, that all the animated delight of gratified vanity, which had made his first attentions to her so delightful—how came it that this had vanished away, like a wreath of thin smoke, into the air ?

Had she, during this time, been sufficiently unfortunate to meet any one with whom she fancied she could have passed her life more happily ? Oh, no ! Nothing in the least degree approaching this had befallen her. She still thought Mr. Cuthbert by far the most elegant gentleman she had ever seen, and her young heart had never ceased to feel grateful for the generous and most flattering preference which he had shown her ; but—oh ! that melancholy BUT !

Much that that included had passed dimly, as it were, before the eyes of her father, mother, and sister, when they shrank from the splendid proposals of Mr. Cuthbert ; but there was

much more that never did nor ever could be suggested by the fancy of any one who had not witnessed something like it.

It is much more easy to say, that Harriet seemed to live in an atmosphere every particle of which was in some sort hostile to the light frolicsome gaiety of her age and character, than to describe the process by which she had been converted, in the space of a few months, from the very brightest and happiest human butterfly that ever wantoned amidst sunshine and flowers, into a still bright-coloured but very hapless insect, caught and imprisoned for the sake of its unlucky beauty.

Nor was the unceasing consciousness that she had made this exchange, not only by her own free will, but by her own obstinate persuasion that she understood what she was about better than those around her, a small item in the catalogue of her sufferings; and there was another, too, perhaps equally pungent, which proceeded from being obliged to confess to herself that there seemed to be something as wrong-headed and wilful in her feeling so deplorably unhappy now, as there had been in her vehement and pertinacious happiness at the time of Mr. Cuthbert's proposal.

For what had she to complain of?

His correction of her words and phrases had never produced any degree of annoyance that could deserve the name of unhappiness; and this was becoming daily less. For the faculties of poor Harriet were as quick as her person was beautiful; and having the most undoubting conviction that Mr. Cuthbert's observations were equally just and valuable, she very speedily abandoned all the phrases that wounded his refinement. Fortunately, she had no provincial accent; neither her father nor mother had any peculiarity of the kind, and this rendered the task of her fastidious husband a very easy one.

Nor could she, without ingratitude, as she thought, permit herself to complain even to her own heart, of the ceaseless, unremitting, and most mysteriously vehement anxiety of Mr. Cuthbert concerning her health; and yet there have been many severe privations—ay, and many heavy sorrows too—endured with less constant consciousness of suffering than fell upon the spirits of the young, healthy, active, gay-spirited Harriet, when she found that she could not move, nor eat, nor sing, nor read, nor write, nor even use her needle, without being told that her health ought to be the first object of all her thoughts, and that the thing she was doing, let it be what it might, was extremely likely to be injurious to her.

This sort of petty persecution was greatly more tormenting in action than it is possible any description can make intelligible. Even the sweet temper of little Harry, and it really was one of the very sweetest in the world, was sometimes in great

danger of giving way before it, and an almost bitter feeling of vexation began to settle on her spirit, as she found her existence becoming more and more like that of a petted dormouse, which is kept rolled in cotton, and expected to peep out from a corner of his cage in order to show his bright eyes to his master, but never permitted, from youth to age, to perform a single gambol for its own amusement.

All this was very sad, and very hard to bear, for such a volatile young thing as Harriet; but it was not by any means what she felt to be the worst part of her destiny; and before an honest statement is made of what was so, it will be necessary to propitiate the mercy of those who may sit in judgment on her—at least, if they should happen to consider her feelings to be as wicked as she did herself.

From the hour in which she awakened from the ill-omened dream, during which she had fancied that the artificial embellishments of human life were the best blessings that Heaven could bestow, she began to become aware of the melancholy fact that she was not so much in love with old Mr. Cuthbert as she had believed herself to be. This, too, was sad, very sad indeed; but if this had been the worst part of the business, she could have borne it, because she felt quite sure that, without fancying herself in love with him, she could make him a gentle, attentive, and obedient wife; and this she determined to do, with a steadiness of purpose that did honour to the education she had received.

But her finding out that she was not really in love with old Mr. Cuthbert was not the worst part of the business. The worst part of the business was, that whatever she might think on the subject, old Mr. Cuthbert himself continued firm in the persuasion that she was in love with him—violently and passionately in love with him. He had been sharp-sighted enough to perceive, during the period of his courtship, that not one of her family approved the match, brilliant as it was, and that it was only by the passion he had so evidently inspired in the young girl herself that he had succeeded in obtaining her. This idea once conceived was far too agreeable to be easily given up. It might have been so with any man, but to one in whose composition personal vanity had so peculiarly large a share, it not only kept possession, but seemed to swallow up nearly every other idea he had.

This intense persuasion of her fondness manifested itself so perpetually and so openly, as to involve her in a succession of little scenes, equally ridiculous and painful.

To resolve deliberately upon opening the eyes of a man who had placed all his happiness in her hands, upon such a point as this, required more courage, and more sternness of character,

than Harriet possessed, and she therefore lived, and felt that she must for ever live, under her own ban as a hypocrite, who permitted herself to be decked in laces, satins, and precious stones, and to fare sumptuously every day, by means of persuading a man, whose touch made her shudder, that she doted upon him!

Unfortunately, too, one of Mr. Cuthbert's principal sources of happiness, from his union with a beautiful young woman who adored him, arose from displaying this supposed adoration before the eyes of all men. As yet, indeed, she had not mixed at all with general society; the clergymen of the various parishes where Mr. Cuthbert's different residences were situated, a country lawyer perhaps, or a greatly-honoured steward, being the only individuals she had been permitted to see, except her own servants. But even the eyes of her servants were quite enough, on such occasions, to overwhelm her with confusion and remorse—remorse for having placed herself in a position where everything she said and did was converted into a lie.

But we must leave this painful picture, in order to look at one of a very different nature.

CHAPTER XX.

HAVING once made up their wise young minds to the necessity of waiting till a small house was converted into a tolerably large one for their reception, the rural lovers found themselves in the enjoyment of all the happiness that fervent and authorized affection and assured hope could bestow; and it certainly would not have been easy to find anywhere a happier party than that formed by the families of Hartwell and Marshdale.

Had not occasional feelings of very deep anxiety for the happiness of the ever-dear Harriet thrown a shade over the Hartwells, they really might have been said to be perfectly happy.

I suppose it is impossible for a pair of young lovers to be in this peculiarly pleasant state of mind, without some symptoms of the measureless contentment appearing on their countenances. Be this as it may, it is certain that Mrs. Montagu, who, though she did not now, as formerly, spend half her life in rambling over the hills, was still a dear lover of a country walk, and often met Mary Hartwell, sometimes alone, sometimes with Susan, and sometimes with Godfrey himself, was so struck by her aspect that she was often induced to transgress, rather more openly than on her first arrival, the standing law,

which prohibited all intercommuning between the inhabitants of the Manor House and those of the Vicarage.

Mary, upon whom no such law was binding, certainly aided and abetted the old lady in all these acts of disobedience very cordially. There was something of originality in all the ways and words of Mrs. Montagu which amused and delighted her exceedingly; and it often happened that, instead of looking shyly askance when she caught sight of her, as many young ladies conscious of being under so severe an interdict might have done, she invariably bounded towards her, and made not the least ceremony of showing that she was delighted to see her.

This sort of agreeable effect is never produced by an old person on a young one without the former becoming very pleasantly conscious of it—the genuine liking and affection of the young is a very delicious incense to the old.

In short, though neither had as yet ever entered the house inhabited by the other, Mrs. Montagu and Mary Hartwell, became, by degrees, fast friends.

The old lady had heard from the servants at the Manor House, that the vicar's daughter was going to marry Farmer Marshdale's son; and it was not long afterwards before she ventured to hint to the pretty bride-elect that this report had reached her.

"But of course you don't believe it, Mrs. Montagu?" said Mary, with a blush and a smile.

"And why not, my dear?" returned the old lady; "yes, I do believe it," she added; "and I wish you joy, with all my heart."

"And you are Mrs. Osterly's first cousin!" cried Mary, venturing to press Mrs. Montagu's arm, which, as usual, when they were walking together, rested on hers.

"Yes, Mary, I am her first cousin; but, somehow or other, I feel as if I were still more nearly related to you."

And then the conversation went on with feelings of increasing love and confidence on both sides, till Mary had told Mrs. Montagu all about the alterations which were beginning at Five-Elms; and Mrs. Montagu had told Mary that she should like very much to make acquaintance with Godfrey. Had anything been wanting to complete the conquest of Mary's affections by the old lady, this intimation would have supplied it; and it was with all the ardour of a happy young heart that she thanked her.

"Upon my word, my dear child," said Mrs. Montagu, in return, "you seem to mistake the nature and object of the introduction I have asked for entirely. I did not ask to become acquainted with Mr. Godfrey Marshdale to please you, but to

please myself. So, if the thing be done, it is I who must give thanks, and not you."

"Oh, Mrs. Montagu!" said Mary.

"And oh, Miss Hartwell!" returned the old lady. "But do you really think, my dear," she continued, "that the accepting the benefactions of bed and board at the Manor House, when offered by my cousin, Mrs. Osterly, can convert an old woman, still to all intents and purposes alive, into a lump of rusty iron, or of mouldering stone, without sense or feeling? Tell me, and tell me very seriously my dear, do you think it ought to do it?"

"No, dear Mrs. Montagu," replied Mary, speaking with all the truth of her true heart; "I do not think it ought to do it, because I do not think that anything ought to make us forget, or smother in any way, the feelings of human kindness which God has planted in our hearts. But, nevertheless, I am afraid that there are many people, Mrs. Montagu, in your situation, who, even if they did in their hearts feel kindly towards us, would be apt to avoid doing any overt act that might make it known."

"On account of my hopes and expectations of being Mrs. Osterly's heir? That is what you mean, my dear—is it not?"

"Yes," replied Mary, as frankly as Mrs. Montagu asked the question.

"And you are right, Mary," replied the old lady—"perfectly right; and I hope I am not wrong in feeling that if I thought I should forfeit my chance of succeeding to Mrs. Osterly's estate by being introduced to Mr. Godfrey Marshdale, I should prefer that the introduction should be postponed to a future opportunity. But I have no such fear, Mary."

"Do you think, Mrs. Montagu, that Mrs. Osterly would hear of it without displeasure?" said Mary, in a voice which bespoke considerable anxiety.

"No, my dear. I think she would be very angry indeed, and perhaps leave her estate in trust to her maid Daws, for the support of a colony of cats. But she will never hear of it, Mary. I never have much to say to any of the servants, and therefore, in one sense, may be said not to have made any friends among them. But neither have I made any enemies; and as Mrs. Osterly makes no secret of her intentions in my favour, I suspect that I am considered as standing in the desirable position of a rising sun. So nobody will tell tales of me; and therefore, dear Mary, I beg I may be introduced to Mr. Godfrey Marshdale at the first convenient opportunity."

This convenient opportunity was not long waited for, and could Mary have been fully aware how well Mrs. Montagu knew how to appreciate the singularly-charming manners of Godfrey,

how thoroughly she understood him, and how speedily she began to love as well as admire him, her own affection for the old lady would have grown, if possible, more rapidly still.

One natural—nay, almost inevitable, result of this intimacy was the taking of Mrs. Montagu to see the works that were going on at Five-Elms; and if the mansion had been preparing for a child of her own, she could scarcely have felt more interest about it; but the effect of this interest upon what was going on was certainly much greater than any of the parties concerned expected.

On first reaching the spot where the old farm-house stood, the truly picturesque eye of Mrs. Montagu was struck both by the great beauty of the scenery which surrounded it, and by the lamentable want of value for that scenery manifested by the original constructors of the building, for the mansion was ingeniously so placed as to have as little extent of view in any direction as possible, and that little as totally devoid of picturesque charm as the nature of the country would permit.

Mary Hartwell, who loved a beautiful landscape almost as well as the old lady herself, failed not to lead her to a spot of very remarkable beauty, which was reached by walking for about five minutes up a gentle acclivity. The effect on reaching this spot, which commanded an opening totally concealed from the dwelling, was quite magical. Instead of looking out upon well-cultivated fields and an orchard thickly planted with flourishing fruit-trees, the eye immediately caught sight of one of the wildest and finest landscapes which the strangely-varied county of Cornwall has to show. Rocks, wood, and water, all contributed to this, and one small field of table-land, comprising about half a dozen acres, was so placed as to command all this, and a good aspect into the bargain, with a very perfect shelter of fine old trees on the north-east.

Mrs. Montagu had not stood on the spot for two minutes before she became convinced that it was her bounden duty, as an honest woman and a real friend, not to let the Marshdale family know rest nor peace, till she had persuaded them to give up the vain attempt of making a pretty residence between the large cattle-pond and the orchard, and to build a new mansion exactly there.

She felt that there would and must be great difficulties in the way of her achieving this; but when once Mrs. Maberly Montagu felt herself convinced of the truth of a proposition, she not only stuck to it firmly, but did not feel quite comfortable and at her ease till all whom the said proposition happened to concern were convinced of the truth of it likewise. She was far from having a bad temper, nor were her peculiarities such as to render it in any degree a difficult task to live with

her ; she was, on the contrary, of a remarkably peaceable disposition—deliberately preferring the withholding her opinion upon contested points altogether, to proclaiming it at the risk of a dispute. But when something in the shape of a matter of fact had taken possession of her mind the case was different : she did not tease others about it, however, half so much as she teased herself. Her mind was of a tough sort of fibre, which, while it resisted with most successful philosophy all disagreeable emotions arising from mere differences of opinion, felt itself painfully distorted, as it were, when she saw an act performed or a deed done one way, when her deliberate judgment convinced her that it would be infinitely better for the parties concerned that it should be done another.

This question about what had best be done for the embellishment of the Five-Elms mansion was exactly a case in point. It was painful to her, to a degree that few people could imagine possible, upon a subject of so little interest to herself, that Marshdale the father should spend some hundreds of pounds in adding to and embellishing a house for Marshdale the son (and his landscape-loving future wife) in an “ugly hole,” as she invariably called the present site of the mansion in all her soliloquies, instead of removing it to a spot where *Salvator Rosa* might have contentedly taken up his station in one direction, and *Ruysdale* in another.

But how was she to set about mending the matter ? Where was her authority ? What was her influence ? The poor lady was completely at fault—so completely that anybody in the world but herself would have abandoned the idea in despair ; but Mrs. Montagu was determined to make an effort for attaining an object which, in her estimation, was of such great importance to the future happiness of her favourite young friend. Had they never taken any picturesque walks together, or had the old lady never discovered in the young one that sort of susceptibility to the influence of beautiful scenery, which is as much a distinct natural gift of organization as a fine ear, she would have been less resolute in her purpose. As it was, she commenced her operations for the performance of the task she had set herself, with equal zeal and cleverness.

Her first step was to ascertain who was the most influential person in the affair, and she soon discovered that it was Farmer Marshdale. With him, therefore, she speedily cultivated an intimate acquaintance, and soon convinced the clear-sighted and intelligent yeoman that whatever the present lady of the manor might be, the one who it seemed likely would succeed her, was a woman of a fine, noble, independent character, with what is often (by way of a compliment) unobviously called a masculine mind, and withal an affectionate kindliness of dispo-

sition, which could hardly fail of winning affectionate kindness in return.

It must not, however, be supposed that the worthy farmer's feelings were thus wrought upon by any systematic process of artful cajolery on the part of good Mrs. Montagu. Her first object in cultivating the acquaintance of the worthy agriculturist certainly was to discover whether he were made of such stuff as might be wrought upon by a plain statement of the superior advantages of the spot to which she was so anxious to make him remove his residence. But while thus employed, she discovered also a rich mine of worth and intelligence, and the result of all this was that the old man became as fully convinced as she could desire, that the very best thing he could do would be to pull down his old house, and build up a new one.

But there is always a reverse to every medal. Mary Hartwell was certainly exceedingly pleased at the idea of having a window to sit at, which commanded a view of the lovely landscape seen from the hill; but then it was almost too dreadful to see how very miserable poor Godfrey looked at the idea of postponing their marriage till a new house was built for them to live in! This source of sorrow could not long be concealed from those whose courageous love of improvement had occasioned it, and then again Godfrey and his Mary might have perceived, if they had any doubts left on the subject, that their happiness was dearly cared for by those on whom at the present moment it seemed chiefly to depend; for but very little time was lost before a proposition was made at the Vicarage, and acceded to at the farm, that the young couple should be married without further delay, and take up their residence under the roof of the bride's father, till their new dwelling should be completely ready for them.

No two espousals (to which the respective brides and bridegrooms were all cordially consenting) could well be more dissimilar than those of Mary and Harriet Hartwell. The preparations for the marriage of Harriet had a sort of insipid smoothness in them, arising from the ease with which great wealth causes all such affairs to proceed, and which effectually prevented all that happy sort of bustle which is caused by the necessity of making good-will and activity supply the want of it. But when the marriage of Mary was afoot, who was there in the parish (besides Mrs. Osterly and her obedient household) that did not feel the exhilarating conviction that they might do something to help it?

The delight of the vicar and his wife, when it was settled that they were to keep possession of their sweet Mary during the long period which must of necessity elapse before another

residence could be ready for her, was greater than they expressed to any save each other. Farmer Marshdale seemed suddenly to have thrown off the burden of twenty years, and to be restored to all the buoyant energy of his best days; and had not his newly-elected friend, and privy-counsellor, been a remarkably plain old lady of near sixty, people might have fancied that the old gentleman had been made young again by the sweet power of love.

But the Hartwell family were the less likely to fall into this mistake, from having so lately witnessed the effect of the tender passion upon an old gentleman of nearly the same age as the newly-inspired farmer, and, fortunately, nothing could be less alike than the state of mind they had seen exhibited by Mr. Cuthbert, and that which now seemed to give new life and energy to Farmer Marshdale.

Nor did the contentment of Mrs. Montagu appear to fall at all short of that of her new friends. During the hours which she spent before the eyes of her fretful cousin at the Manor House, she doubtless constrained herself sufficiently to exhibit a proper degree of demureness under the melancholy family circumstances by which they were both afflicted, and to which Mrs. Osterly's allusions were as punctual as, and a great deal more frequent than, the striking of the clock; but when released from this dismal companionship, it would have been difficult to find an old lady in higher spirits than Mrs. Maberly Montagu. In short, with the exception of the Manor House, the whole village of Penmorris was in a most agreeable state of excitement, and not even an unusually long silence on the part of Harriet could chill that delicious feeling of happiness at the Vicarage, which caused every look to be a smile and every word to be an expression of either joy or hope.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. CUTHBERT, meanwhile, whom it is really no longer proper to call Harriet, inasmuch as she is rapidly becoming a great lady, did not maintain this long silence towards her family without suffering a good deal, at the very bottom of her young heart, though there was no single human being existing to whom she would willingly have confessed so much.

The very deep and ever-present consciousness that whatever she did, or might, suffer from having changed her native condition for one so violently contrasted with it, was the consequence of her own wilful will, was the misery which

seemed at this time to weigh the heaviest upon her ; or, to speak more correctly, it was the bitter thought which mingled itself with every sorrow, and with every annoyance that assailed her, adding self-reproach to every other suffering.

But at nineteen there is an immense fund of hope, and expectation of future enjoyment, in such a mind as Harriet's. There is too, so to say, an immense need of it. A few lines taken from her journal at this time, may serve to explain her feelings :

"I should very much like to know whether I really am a great deal more silly than other people, or whether all that has happened to me is the natural consequence of the singular accident which threw me in the way of a person whose position places him in a sphere of life so very unlike everything that I had been before accustomed to.

"In the latter case, there is still something like hope for me, because what now seems new and strange, will cease to seem so by and by, and then, if I have put myself out of the reach of being happy in one way, I may still hope to be so in another. One good thing is, that I have not changed my opinion in the least degree about Mr. Cuthbert's being the most elegant man I ever saw. I am really and truly thankful for that ! And then he is so very fond of me, that I begin to think I shall be wicked if I do not endeavour to find happiness of some sort, or other, in being his wife. I will do my very best to look both well and happy at all the fine parties that he says I shall have to go to. And one thing, at least, I am quite sure will make me happy without any trying at all, and that is, the going to the theatre. Shall I ever forget the delight of my first play, at Exeter ? I think I should have liked it better if the box which he has taken for the whole year was at the English, instead of the Italian, play-house. However, I don't intend to grumble about that, or anything else. And who knows but it may help me, after all, to beat Mary in Italian ?"

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This incidental mention of her distant sister brought her pen, which was running very glibly, to a full stop. But after the interval of a minute or two, she resumed it, but in a tone less gay. "Beat Mary ?—no, I shall never beat, nor even equal her, in anything ! And, alas ! it is when thinking of her and my dear, dear father and mother, that I touch upon what is the greatest, and what ought, perhaps, to be the only real sorrow I have in the world ! Is it possible that it is nearly a month since I received Mary's last letter, and that it is still unanswered ? I am sure it is not because I have not thought of them all ! But, oh, this dreadful marriage ! How and when shall I ever find courage to announce it to him ? And how can

I reply to a letter, which expressly charges me to tell them how Mr. Cuthbert receives the news, by the confession that I have not dared to announce it to him?"

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This last trouble was indeed a real one. It would not be easy to describe the manner in which Mr. Cuthbert, in the midst of all his passionate admiration, unbounded liberality, and unceasingly tender care, contrived, at every moment of her existence, to make his young wife feel that he was her benefactor, quite as much as her husband and her adorer.

For the first few months after their marriage, he not only made her feel it constantly, but so acutely, that many other feelings were to a certain degree deadened by it, as all feelings are, when some strong consciousness or sensation predominates. But this one was not at all likely to endure for ever, or even for very long, inasmuch as it resulted from very profound ignorance of the relative position of husbands and wives, as exhibited in the grand arena of fashionable society into which it was the steadfast purpose of Mr. Cuthbert to introduce her.

All preliminary measures having been taken for the purpose, the launching this bright little bark into the full tide of London bon-ton was achieved, not only without difficulty, but with the most brilliant and triumphant success.

It would be difficult to say whether Mr. Cuthbert's most ardent wish at this time was for the announcement of a coming heir, or for a general declaration from the world of fashion that Mrs. Cuthbert was decidedly the beauty, par excellence, of the season. But Mr. Cuthbert had lived long enough to know that if he could not command these two blessings at one and the same moment, it was the part of a wise man to rejoice for that which was first accorded, and to wait with decent patience for that which was yet to come.

In pursuance, therefore, of this only rational line of conduct, he contrived to have his beautiful young wife exhibited to as many fashionable eyes as the immutable limits of time and space would permit, and he was rewarded by reaping, in all directions, such testimonies of success as certainly justified the complacency with which he meditated upon the shrewd discernment which had enabled him to discover this peerless treasure, athwart all the tremendous disadvantages of her rural and obscure condition.

Mr. Cuthbert certainly was at this moment a very happy man; for not only had he realised that favourite vision of his latter years, the having to display one of the most beautiful women in England as his wife, but he had the, perhaps, un-hoped-for gratification of doing it with the conviction that she was most passionately attached to him. Nor was this all, for

there was another source of joy and triumph in store for him, of which he had never dreamed, and for which he certainly had never dared to hope.

While the sight of the admiration so generally bestowed on his young wife inspired him with all the agreeable sensations consequent upon the gratification of pampered vanity, its effect upon the fair young creature herself was scarcely less exhilarating, for, in the first place, it completely wiped away, and for ever, the extremely disagreeable persuasion that she was more deeply indebted to her husband's condescension in marrying her, than any woman in the world that she had ever heard of, and considerably more than she thought it at all right or agreeable that any woman should be.

It was, however, quite impossible that this very humble state of mind could continue under the existing circumstances. Mrs. Cuthbert could not, by possibility, avoid feeling that she was of some consequence in the circle to which she had been introduced, and soon after this conviction came upon her she had still more decisive reasons for believing that she was not only of consequence to her circle of acquaintance, but also to the all-important being whom she still dutifully felt to be the centre of it. Mrs. Cuthbert, in short, soon learned to know that she was of great consequence to no less a personage than Mr. Cuthbert himself.

In order to make this clearly understood, it will be necessary to inform the reader that at one period of Mr. Cuthbert's life, and that not a very distant one, he had conceived a very strong desire to obtain a high-sounding rather than a lucrative place in the Prince Regent's household; but in this he had failed, being baffled, in repeated instances, by the real or supposed influence of some privy-counsellor of masculine mind but feminine gender.

In the hope, not of counteracting this influence (he was too skilful a courtier for that), but of enlisting it in favour of his own claim, he took prompt and very decisive steps towards forming a little personal friendship of his own with the fair counsellors in question. He first tried one, and then another; but in neither instance did he advance an inch beyond the having a few costly trinkets playfully accepted. For the credit of his common sense, however, it must be stated that he never seriously conceived the treasonable thought of superseding, by his mature, but still 'svelt' and graceful comeliness, the ponderous attractions of his royal master. Mr. Cuthbert had no such stuff in his thoughts; his only object was to obtain, by some means or other—he very little cared what—a well-looking mention of his own name in the Red Book. But, as before stated, he failed, and was fain to console himself by

recollecting that the toy he had longed for, but could not catch, was not so essential to him as it might have been to some others.

And he did so console himself.

Nevertheless, the first thing that came into his head upon being told that the Regent, after a long and deliberate examination of Mrs. Cuthbert, had declared her to be the most perfectly beautiful creature that had appeared for the last twenty years, was, that this opinion, if skilfully improved, might enable him to obtain, by the influence of his own wife, what he had in vain attempted to obtain through the influence of one or two other gentlemen's wives.

But here, again, a word must be added, in justice to Mr. Cuthbert.

The idea of obtaining an appointment in the establishment of the Prince Regent, through the interest of his wife, included not the slightest idea of her doing anything that could seriously compromise either his honour or her own.

Though Mr. Cuthbert had not yet succeeded in obtaining a place about the gorgeous Regent, his associations had brought him sufficiently within the interior circle of that very singularly-constituted court to prevent his feeling at all alarmed at the idea of the fair Mrs. Cuthbert becoming the object of his Royal Highness's conspicuous admiration. The vulgar mob, indeed, might for a while peep from a distance at an occasional tête-à-tête with royalty, and might point, and nod, and beck, among themselves, as to what it might mean; but to this—and he had no fear that matters would go further—Mr. Cuthbert felt, in his very inmost heart, that he should have no objection whatever.

Such being the state of his feelings, opinions, wishes, and intentions, he lost no time in making use of the information he had received of the effect produced by the beauty of his young wife. He flattered himself that at no very distant period his own personal acquaintance with the royal personage who "the likeness of a kingly crown had on," would be sufficiently improved to permit his beseeching, without impropriety, the presence of the Regent at the splendid fête which it was his purpose to give in the course of the season, and if this invitation was accepted, he felt that, let what would follow, he should have at least gained one great step in advance.

These plans and projects, and the hoped-for honours which were to result from them, seemed positively to inspire Mr. Cuthbert with a species of brilliant animation which he had never previously, even in his very gayest days, displayed. He was gay and gallant to excess in his manners to his young wife—seemed to consider her as so greatly improved, as to require no

more lessons on language, and even permitted her to walk across the room occasionally, without reminding her that her first duty was to attend to her health.

But, nevertheless, there was still one point upon which he felt a little nervous, and not, perhaps, altogether without reason; in short, he feared that it was not altogether impossible that Mrs. Cuthbert might blunder a little in her manner of conducting herself towards their "royal master," as he delighted to call him, and might possibly not think it her bounden duty to have neither eyes nor ears for any other individual in company, if this illustrious personage condescended to make it manifest that he was conscious that so humble a being as herself existed. That any such blundering as this would be fatal, the accomplished Mr. Cuthbert was perfectly aware, and perfectly determined, with his usual excellent judgment, to prevent it.

The following dialogue, with his more-than-ever-admired wife, will show the very simple but very effective means by which he guarded against the danger he feared.

It was at the breakfast-table that this conjugal dialogue took place, on the next morning but one after the approving sentence from the lips of the illustrious prince had been repeated to the flattered husband. The intervening day had been almost wholly devoted by Mr. Cuthbert to meditation. He felt that the present was a most important epoch in his existence, and that he ought neither to do nor to say anything that might bear upon it without mature reflection, and of this mature reflection the following conversation was the result.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE gaiety of London, my sweet love," he began, "appears to agree with you exceedingly well. I never saw you look in more perfect health or more perfect beauty than you do at this moment."

Harriet smiled rather languidly, but replied—"Oh, yes! I feel quite well, Mr. Cuthbert."

"You never before saw such a ball as that at Lady Rippleton's, my dear love? Did you not think it very splendid?" said Mr. Cuthbert.

"Certainly I did!" replied his wife, very cordially. "The rooms, the dresses, everything was gay and beautiful."

"And you enjoyed it, dearest?" said he. "I am very sure you did, or you could not have looked so radiantly beautiful!"

"Indeed, I enjoyed it very much," replied Harriet, cordially. "I love dancing dearly, especially to such beautiful music. Oh! what a difference between Lady Rippleton's orchestra and that of the Falmouth ball-room!"

"Why, yes, my sweet Harriet, I rather suppose so, though the orchestra of the Falmouth ball-room is unknown to me," said her husband, with a patronizing smile. "But there was one feature of Lady Rippleton's party that you have not yet mentioned, my dear love; but which, nevertheless, was by far the most important one in it."

"Oh, yes!" replied Harriet, gaily—"I know what you mean."

"Do you, my love?—I dare say you do, little rustic though you are! And what was it, Harriet?" demanded her husband, playfully.

"The beautiful flowers, to be sure!" she replied; "and it was a shame not to mention them at first! What are all the fine dresses in the world compared to all those lovely roses?"

"Oh, Harriet! Harriet!" returned Mr. Cuthbert, shaking his head, but without appearing, however, at all seriously angry—"I do not know, what your excellent and truly loyal father would say to that. Has he never talked to you, with, love and veneration, of our glorious monarch, George the Third?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Cuthbert—to be sure he has!" replied Harriet—"a hundred times over. But what has our good, dear old king, George the Third, to do with Lady Rippleton's roses?"

"His aged Majesty has assuredly little or nothing to do with Lady Rippleton's roses, Harriet. But your loyalty to your king has a great deal to do with the feelings which his most illustrious son and successor, our glorious Prince Regent, ought to inspire, upon your finding yourself for the first time in a private room with him."

"Indeed, Mr. Cuthbert, I would not do anything contrary to loyalty for the whole world. I should think that I ought to have my head cut off if I did!" replied Harriet, very earnestly. "But it never came into my mind," she added, "that our loyalty had anything to do with thinking those beautiful flowers better worth looking at than the gentleman you told me was the Prince Regent. Between you and me, Mr. Cuthbert, I certainly think he is the least interesting person I ever saw! If it had been his poor dear father, I am sure I should have felt quite differently; and it is very likely indeed that if he had been there I should have looked more at him, and thought more about him, than of all the flowers, or of the dancing either."

Mr. Cuthbert listened to this alarming speech with an aspect that was more than grave—it was solemn. At first, his giddy young wife seemed almost unconscious of this, for she was rather busily employed in arranging orange marmalade upon her bread and butter ; but she looked up at him as she concluded, and certainly felt a good deal surprised, and a little alarmed, at the expression of his features.

For a moment there was perfect silence, and then Mr. Cuthbert said, in that sort of low and gentle tone which, when accompanied by a solemn aspect, is greatly more impressive than any degree of violence—"How shall I express to you, my dearest love, the intense pain which your disrespectful manner of mentioning our gracious sovereign occasions me ! For the Prince Regent is our sovereign, Harriet—our true and lawful sovereign, and to hear the voice of my wife pronounce his name with levity is one of the most painful events that ever happened to me"

Poor Harriet was thunderstruck. Here, as it seemed to her startled ears, was a regular charge of high treason brought against her ; and she felt, moreover, that she had not a word to say in her own defence.

The gentleman whom she had mentioned so irreverently was, then, neither more nor less than her lawful sovereign ! It was quite impossible that Mr. Cuthbert could feign a greater degree of horror on the occasion than poor little Harriet really felt, and it was with the most perfect sincerity that she said, "My dear Mr. Cuthbert, I am ashamed of myself and my own ignorance. As long as the dear old king, George the Third, was alive, I really and truly thought that he was the only person for whom we ought to feel what is called loyalty, which I perfectly well know it is as much our duty to feel as love for our parents, though of course not quite in the same degree, you know. But if this royal prince, who is called the Regent, is to be considered, as you say, our true and lawful sovereign, I will teach myself to feel all the loyalty to him that my dear father taught me to feel for King George."

"As I say, Harriet ? For Heaven's sake, my dearest love, do not fancy that this is any notion peculiar to me ! How it comes that your poor dear father has never instructed you in the nature of this delegated authority I am at a loss to understand ; but that the Prince Regent is, to all intents and purposes, our lawful king, I do entreat you to believe, without retaining a shadow of doubt upon the subject."

"And I do believe it, Mr. Cuthbert," replied his penitent wife, in accents of the very deepest sincerity, and with a sort of innocent contrition in her manner that was very agreeable

to him ; "and it is a great comfort to me to remember," she added, "that nobody has ever heard me speak of him in that sort of thoughtless manner but yourself."

"That is indeed a comfort, my love !" he replied ; "for it is as though it never had been uttered, dearest ; for I need not, I am sure, declare to you that no earthly power could be strong enough to induce me to repeat what I heard you say. And now, then, my dearest Harriet, all that is left me to say on the subject is, to request that you will suffer what has just passed to rest profoundly engraved upon your mind, and that, should you ever be fortunate enough to be honoured by any especial notice from the illustrious personage of whom we have been speaking, you will receive it smiling with the grateful joyfulness with which it becomes a loyal subject to welcome such a condescension from the sovereign ; and that, my dear, without remembering, even in your very heart, whether he be old or young, handsome or ugly, thin or fat !"

"Oh, dear, dear, Mr. Cuthbert—how very severe that is !" cried poor Harriet, blushing to the very top of her forehead.

"Well, well ; we will try, both of us, never to allude to what has passed again, provided, that is to say, my dear love, that I perceive by your manner of receiving any notice the sovereign may be pleased to bestow upon you, that your sentiments and feelings towards him are such as they ought to be."

No campaign could have been more skilfully opened, and the measures afterwards taken by the ambitious commoner were decided upon and carried out in the same able style.

It is unnecessary to trace the various onward steps by which Mr. Cuthbert achieved the great object of obtaining for himself and his fair wife repeated invitations to those small supper-parties at Carlton House which were held in those days to be the most satisfactory marks of distinction that could be bestowed upon talent and beauty. The right of entrée on the part of the courtiers seemed merged in the right of selection on that of the Regent, and ladies who did not object to be a little talked about, and gentleman who owed their existence to being talked about a good deal, doubtless found these re-unions among the most agreeable in the world.

Nor was the novice, Harriet, by any means insensible to the charm of a circle in which there was often a considerable sprinkling of that sort of sparkling talent which makes itself seen and felt wherever it is present, together with much of grace and beauty, ever captivating to all whose self-adoration leaves them leisure to contemplate it ; and enough of brilliant fashion and imposing rank to make a new young creature like Mrs. Cuthbert feel herself as much honoured as pleased by being admitted to it.

And thus, for a time, what constituted the chief happiness of the husband constituted the chief happiness of the wife also ; so that their matrimonial ' tête-à-tête ' breakfasts were perfectly harmonious, and altogether free from reproofs or corrections of any kind.

In truth, the faculties of Harriet were so quick, that they might very fairly have been termed brilliant, had her education been of the kind to call forth and put to profit the easily-awakened and rapidly-kindled powers of her mind. There was scarcely any object she saw, or any conversation she listened to, in this her new state of existence, which did not assist the development of some faculty, some taste, some feeling, of which she had never been conscious before ; and nothing could be more charming than the effect of all this upon her fresh and perfectly unaffected manners. Had she been less genuinely delighted by what she saw and heard, she would have been herself infinitely less captivating ; for there is no antidote to the power of youth, beauty, and even wit itself, so fatally effective as the languor of satiety, and the dull weariness which accompanies the feeling, that all amidst which we live is stale, flat, and unprofitable.

Happily for the projects of Mr. Cuthbert, it was long, very long, before his young wife could bring herself to believe, it possible that there was or could be any mixture of what is commonly called gallantry in the attentions paid her by the ugly fat old man to whom a most innocent and sincere feeling of loyalty made her listen with a thousand times more deference and eager observance than she would have accorded to the most captivating Adonis that ever adorned a court ; and deep, deep, was the hatred she inspired in more than one fat, if not exactly plain, old woman, when the fat old man was seen, night after night, to steal away from his female counselors and favourites of long standing in order to amuse himself in a little chit-chat with the Cornish beauty—"the pearl of his dukedom," as he was pleased to call her.

With all his innumerable follies, Mr. Cuthbert had both wit and tact enough to know extremely well how to bring his own gentlemanlike person sufficiently before the eyes of his (de facto) sovereign to prevent his forgetting that this "pearl of his dukedom" had a husband, and one whom his Royal Highness was quite ready to acknowledge was not altogether unworthy of her ; for George the Fourth, even so early as the year 1813, had begun to think that elderly gentlemen were, upon the whole, a good deal more attractive than young ones.

So the heart of Mr. Cuthbert was frequently made to glow with the most loyal and delightful emotions from the occasional nods and even smiles bestowed upon him by the Prince

Regent. In short, he felt, and perhaps he was not much mistaken, that a very fair and favouring gale filled the sails of his ambition, which required nothing but a little skilful pilotage to bring him into the haven where he wished to be. Had he himself been actually at the helm, he felt that the thing would be easy, but unfortunately he was not, and if he asked himself the disagreeable question, "who was?" he was obliged to confess that it was one equally unconscious of the power and unlikely to use it. In short, he knew perfectly well that there was nobody but his wife—the innocent, ignorant, and unconscious Harriet, who could perform for him the service he required—namely, that of being mentioned to his Royal Master as an individual earnestly desirous of devoting himself to his royal service as one of his royal establishment.

It may be thought, by what has been already seen of Mr. Cuthbert's unceremonious way of schooling his young wife, that he would have felt little or no difficulty in dictating to her a form of words to have been addressed by her to the ear of the Regent, which would have conveyed his wishes in the very clearest, and, nevertheless, in the most graceful and amiable manner. But the fact was otherwise. Mr. Cuthbert, though by no means a particularly audacious man, would greatly have preferred walking up to a presiding judge upon the bench and addressing something very decidedly impertinent to him, rather than ask his young and very obedient wife to request the Prince Regent to make him one of his equerries.

Perhaps if he had been quite—quite aware how completely free Harriet's mind was from the very slightest suspicion that any species of love-making either existed, or could be suspected to exist, in the imagination of the Royal personage whom she felt herself by duty bound to honour, he might have been less scrupulous. But Mr. Cuthbert had lived for the last forty years of his life in what is expressively called "the world," and he really was incapable of conceiving it possible that any woman could receive, during six or seven successive weeks, attention so marked from the illustrious individual in question as to call upon her the observation of all that world, and the envy of a large portion of it, and yet remain entirely unconscious of the fact.

Had he believed her only as fearless as himself of any serious results from this flattering philandering, the affair would in that case also have been widely different; for then he might have told her playfully, as many a confidential husband has done before him, that it would be nothing more than right to repay herself for the bore of listening to so much twaddle, by obtaining, either for herself or family, something more precious than the privilege of being placed always within reach

of having the royal tediousness bestowed especially upon her.

But how was it possible to speak in such a tone as this to a woman who had no other idea, in sitting with submissive patience for hours to listen to all that her royal master was pleased to say to her, than that she was performing the duty of a loyal subject?

His compliments she received respectfully as the language of the court; and when a little dash of tender softness mixed itself in the expression of his admiration, she attributed it to that condescending kindness of temper by which Mr. Cuthbert had often told her this accomplished prince won the hearts of his subjects as firmly as their allegiance.

Mr. Cuthbert saw and knew all this, till his hopes almost sickened into despair; but yet, when he marked half the eyes he encountered glancing at him with hatred and envy, his conscience, as he called it, told him that it would be a sin if he did not profit by an advantage which all others seemed to value at its worth; and he therefore at last determined to confide his hitherto unnamed wishes to his wife, and endeavour to convince her that it was not only her duty to be loyal to her sovereign, but equally so to give her most earnest assistance in obtaining what it would be so highly honourable to her husband to receive.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was in conformity to this newly-formed resolution that Mr. Cuthbert thus addressed his wife, after an evening passed at Carlton House, during which his Royal Highness had seemed to defy the displeasure of one or two of the most influential members of his female cabinet more openly than ever, while he amused himself by listening to Mrs. Cuthbert's opinions on all that had appeared most new and most remarkable upon her migration from his "duchy" to his "capital."

"I was excessively gratified last night, my dearest love," he began—"by observing our gracious sovereign's most flattering manner to you. Oh, Harriet! what a truly glorious privilege you enjoy, in being thus permitted to converse, with all the delightful familiarity of an intimate friend, with the first sovereign in Europe! Does not your very heart swell with loyal love and devotion when he speaks to you?"

"I certainly feel very grateful for so much condescension," replied Mrs. Cuthbert, very nearly yawning as she remembered

how very, very tired she had been before the sort of 'tête-à-tête,' with which she had been honoured by her royal master, had been brought to a conclusion by his getting up at last and walking off.

"Grateful? indeed, my sweet Harriet, it seems to me that grateful is a weak word to express what a loyal subject ought to feel at being so distinguished. Are you aware, my sweet love, that there is not a peeress in the three kingdoms who would not gladly give her richest necklace only to be honoured by a conversation half as long as you enjoyed last night?"

"Enjoyed!" thought Harriet; and then, notwithstanding all her loyalty, she actually did yawn; but she said nothing.

"Good Heaven, you are not well, my dearest love!" exclaimed her attentive husband. "It is perfectly impossible you could yawn while speaking on such a subject, unless you were suffering from indisposition."

"Oh, no, Mr. Cuthbert; I am quite well, I do assure you!" cried Harriet very eagerly, fearing that the tormenting solicitude for her health, which had of late been considerably remitted, was about to revive again.

"Then how comes it that you yawn, my sweetest love, when I have the happiness of speaking to you upon such an affair?"

"Merely because we were so very late last night," she replied, beginning to eat with more than usual appearance of appetite; for, as usual, the breakfast-table was the scene of their discussion.

"Thank Heaven, my sweet love, that there is no worse cause for it. If this delightful familiarity of intercourse with our beloved sovereign goes on increasing as it has done of late, you will get accustomed to late hours, my lovely Harriet, and then they will cease to be injurious; everything of this sort depends on habit. But tell me, dearest, does it not strike you that the Regent has of late assumed towards you a tone to which, without presumption, we might almost give the epithet of friendly?"

"Good Heavens! no, Mr. Cuthbert!" replied Harriet, looking almost terrified at what appeared to her to be so very presumptuous a phrase. "Condescending he certainly is," she continued, in a tone of deep respect; "and, when I consider his age, as well as his station, I cannot help thinking that the remarkable condescension he shows, by taking so much notice of me, arises from exactly the same sort of feeling that I should have towards one of the little village girls from Penmorris, if I saw one of them brought by some strange accident into the middle of a gay party in our fine drawing-room. I know perfectly well that I should feel more inclined to take notice of her than of anybody else, both from pity and from—from cu-

riosity, I believe ; just to see, you know, how she would bear it—and I have a very great idea that the Prince Regent's notice of me is something of the same kind. Do you not think this is more likely than that he should feel anything at all deserving the name of friendship for me ? ”

There was something so simple, so natural, so uncoquettish, and so un-fine-lady-like in this question, that for a moment it overthrew the tactics of the elegant Mr. Cuthbert completely. A sensation, a good deal resembling anger, at her idiot-like ignorance, mixed itself with his discomfiture ; but the movement was not so vehement as to rob him of his discretion ; and, if the inmost thoughts of so dignified a personage may be conveyed by so vulgar an idiom, it might be said that he knew a great deal too well on which side his bread was buttered, to permit any look or word, at all less sweet than honey, to pass his courtier lips.

“ It is impossible, my sweet love,” he replied, “ not to admire you the more, for the beautiful, but singular, absence of all vanity which your observation on the sovereign's manner to you displays. But you know the old proverb, my dearest Harriet, ‘ Lookers-on see most of the game.’ Nothing can be more true than this ; and I, as a looker-on, and one, too, not wholly unused to the business of observing men and things—I venture, my dear love, to assure you, that in this case you have totally misunderstood the feelings of our sovereign. I know the Prince Regent well, my sweet Harriet, and have studied his noble character profoundly. The sort of pitying tenderness you speak of, would never be shown by him to a lady whom he has evidently selected, in the most flattering and honourable manner, as one of the fair and graceful persons by whose presence it is his royal will to adorn his court. I need hardly tell you, my sweet love, how gratifying it is to me, to have the taste and judgment which led me to select you, when hidden in your native shades, sanctioned by an approval of such high authority.”

Having made this speech, Mr. Cuthbert paused, for the double purpose of eating a little more breakfast, and of giving his words time to produce their full effect, before he added more.

It did sometimes happen that when Mr. Cuthbert uttered a didactic sort of harangue of rather more than usual length, his young wife was rather apt to let some part of it escape her. This was quite unintentional on her part, and quite contrary to her own theory as to what was right and proper ; but it is not more true that a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear, than that the words of the aged doze, if they do not absolutely snore, in the ears of the young.

But it was not so now, however. There was something so

strange, and, as it appeared to her, so unaccountable, in the pre-eminent position which seemed to be accorded to her, not only by the Regent himself, but by every one among the habitual visitors at Carlton House, that her curiosity, as well as her vanity, had certainly been awakened by it, and she listened with great attention to every word : and, after he had ceased to speak, she meditated very gravely for a minute or two upon what he had said, and then replied.

"And I, too, my dear Mr. Cuthbert, feel very glad that my introduction to society so every way new to me, has not proved a source of mortification to you. It is certainly very natural that we should both of us feel this ; but it does not appear to me equally natural that we should constantly see ladies of superior rank, of the most graceful manners, and with all the charming ease which results from having been long accustomed to the scenes in which we see them move—it does not seem natural to me, Mr. Cuthbert, that these ladies should be so very often put in the background, as they decidedly are, while a person so very much younger, and in every way of so very much less consequence, as myself, should be treated with so much more respect and distinction ; and I cannot help still thinking that it would not be so, unless it were for a good-natured wish on the part of the Regent to remove the countifified shyness—which, perhaps, he thinks I suffer from more than I really do—or else that it is all done purely to amuse himself, by watching the effect of so much dazzling novelty upon an ignorant young creature like me."

Mr. Cuthbert actually blushed, as much as an elderly courtier could blush, while listening to this very innocent, but very blundering commentary upon his royal master's caprice for his own beautiful young wife. Perhaps he blushed from shame, at his own efforts to throw dust into the eyes of one who trusted him with such perfect confidence ; or, perhaps he blushed because he found that he had still so much to do, before he could hope to obtain the noble object that he had in view. However this might be, the emotion soon passed, and was followed by feelings more creditable to his conjugal firmness and the consistency of his character.

He suffered a moment of silence to follow the words of his rather troublesome young wife, during which he finished eating the egg which he had been preparing while she spoke, and then, having wiped his mouth, and sipped a little tea, he looked at her, with a gentle and most benignant smile, and said, "You must not be displeased with me, my dearest love, if I take the liberty of telling you that as yet you are not very far advanced in the study of human character. If you were, my dear Harriet, you could not so completely mistake the feelings

of our royal master. Nothing can be further from my thoughts, than the uttering anything approaching to blame for the blunder you have made, but I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, that with a friend near you so able and so willing to explain everything to you as I am, there will be cause for blame if you refuse to listen to me."

"Cause for blame!" exclaimed Mrs. Cuthbert, eagerly; "indeed, and indeed there would, unless you believed that I had actually lost my senses, and therefore could not listen to you."

"Which Heaven forbid, sweet love!" he tenderly replied. "But merely listening will not suffice, dear Harriet—you really must receive my interpretation of all you see and hear, with the undoubting faith it deserves, or depend upon it we shall both be placed in a very painful and embarrassing position."

It was now Mrs. Cuthbert's turn to colour, which she did violently, and even painfully, as she replied,—

"Oh! pray, do not say so! Believe me there is nothing in the world I would not do, rather than involve you in any difficulties by refusing to comply with your instructions. What do you mean, Mr. Cuthbert? What painful and embarrassing circumstances can possibly threaten us, even if I do not very clearly understand what it is that makes the Regent talk more to me than he does to anybody else?"

"Do not look so terrified, my dearest love," returned her husband, mildly. "Of course, I do not mean that in these days any actual personal danger threatens us. I do not wish you to suppose that there is any danger that we should either of us be sent to the Tower, because you blunder about the real meaning of the Prince Regent's friendly manner to you. Nothing of that sort is at all likely to happen—it would be folly to suppose it. But I will tell you honestly and fairly at once, Harriet, that I think it more than possible—I certainly think it highly probable—that if you persevere in perfectly misunderstanding the sovereign's gracious manner towards you, it will not be very long before I shall be given to understand that it would be better for me to take up my residence at one of my country mansions. Such things have happened before now, I assure you."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Mrs. Cuthbert, gravely. "Not, however, from any fear of your being exposed to such a disgrace, because if my doing everything you desire me to do can prevent it, you may take my solemn word for it that it will be prevented. But I am very, very sorry to hear that the son and successor of our great and good king, George the Third, should be liable to such lamentable caprice. In short, to such very contemptible weakness!"

"Hush, hush, Harriet! you are positively uttering treason!" said her husband, half in jest, and half in earnest, as it seemed. "It is not right, dearest, to use such language as that, when speaking of our lawful sovereign; neither is it just, when speaking of the truly admirable prince who now rules England. But when people are of sufficiently high rank, as in my own case, dearest, to approach the sovereign, either in my own person, or in that of any of my family, with sufficient familiarity to be treated as a personal acquaintance, it follows, as a matter of course, that some traits of character will develop themselves, which have no connection whatever with the royal functions; and then it is that the vast difference between persons who understand individual character, and those who do not, develops itself. I need scarcely tell you, my love, that you would not have been permitted to approach the royal presence in the manner you have done, had I not been previously known to him as a gentleman of large landed possessions and considerable political interest. This is a class which holds great influence at court, as I doubt not your good father could have told you, if he had considered the entering upon such subjects as a necessary part of female education. That the fact is so, nobody has ever attempted to deny; and you cannot expect that I, as being one of the body, can doubt that its influence is useful. Nevertheless, I am aware that the consciousness of this influence sometimes leads the sovereign to appear almost too anxious to propitiate it. During several years past, it has been intimated to me, that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent was very anxious to appoint me to the situation of equerry, but this can never be done without some solicitation having been made for the appointment. Now, this solicitation I have never preferred, either directly or indirectly, to his Royal Highness; partly because the appointment was a matter of perfect indifference to me, and partly because I have amused myself so constantly by moving about from place to place, that I really have never found leisure to make the application in a proper manner."

"But surely, Mr. Cuthbert, if the Regent were displeased by your negligence on this point, he would never think of manifesting it by such very marked civility to your wife," said Harriet.

"Now, my dear love," replied Mr. Cuthbert, "you touch exactly upon the point we are discussing. I have an intimate friend, my dear Harriet, who knows more about the real feelings of the Regent than any man living. As I shall not mention his name, I betray no confidence by telling you that this friend, who is a man of the nicest honour, and may be trusted implicitly, has more than once told me that he had

part of the royal Regent's sentiments towards her. But he had no cause for any such fears. The young daughter of such a couple as Mr. Hartwell and his wife, brought up in a quiet little village in Cornwall, and emerging from it for the first time some seven-and-thirty years ago, was much more likely to have suspected a new Gunpowder Plot, than to have conceived any fears that the aged Regent intended to make love to her, or that her aged husband was exceedingly well-pleased that so it should be.

But although Mr. Cuthbert did not ask her to explain herself, she did so, the very moment that she felt she had sufficiently recovered her composure to attempt it.

"I should be very sorry indeed, Mr. Cuthbert," she said, "that you should think me a more foolish person than I really am, because my first wish is that you should think well of me in all ways ; but I should be doing what I am quite sure would be very wrong, were I to give you reason to suppose that I would say or do what I am quite certain I never could bring myself to say and do, notwithstanding my earnest wish to obey you in everything. I am quite sure that the idea of taking advantage of my sovereign's condescending kindness, in order to ask a favour, would positively rob me of the power of speaking at all."

Mr. Cuthbert smiled, and shook his head.

"It would, indeed, Mr. Cuthbert," she continued, "I must know my own self better than anybody else can know me ; and I am certain that I could no more articulate the words you have dictated than I could breathe in water."

There was no longer any danger that Mr. Cuthbert should lose his temper. He now thought that he saw all the difficulties that lay before him with the clearness of vision peculiar to clever men of the world ; and that he had within him such ample resources in the skill, tact, and admirable 'savoir faire' upon which he prided himself, as could not fail of securing him success in the pursuit of the object which he was now more than ever bent upon obtaining.

The total blindness of his young wife, as to the real meaning of all the respectful manœuvres which left her so frequently what was, for all purposes of conversational love-making, *tête-à-tête* with her "royal master," gave him all the courage he wanted to push her into such a degree of familiar acquaintance with his Royal Highness, as would, ere long, effectually remove the shyness which was evidently now the only obstacle to her making the request, which he very reasonably thought would be granted the moment she did make it ; and with this conviction to urge him forward, he speedily sketched out for himself a line of conduct, which, though likely to cost him a

few thousands, would be certain of obtaining the prize he had in view, long before there could be any danger of his seriously injuring his fortune by his increased expenses.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE first important step which Mr. Cuthbert decided on after this conversation was, that he would give a magnificent fancy dress ball, to which the Prince Regent should be invited. His circle of acquaintance, even before his marriage with "the Pearl of the Duchy," was decidedly a very aristocratical one for a man unconnected with the peerage or the government, and having nothing remarkable appertaining to him save an unencumbered estate of nine or ten thousand a-year. But it had been the principal object of his life to make it so; and the result was exactly what such steady perseverance deserved. Neither will it be doubted, that the sort of fashion which in the year 1813 was sure to follow such attentions as the Regent had been pleased to bestow upon Mrs. Cuthbert, was likely to increase his facilities for filling his handsome drawing-rooms with such a party as his royal master might be well pleased to meet.

No attempt of the kind ever succeeded better; and never did a prosperous gentleman witness the squandering of his rents, from midnight to sunrise, with more perfect satisfaction.

There was one little 'tour de force' which he imagined, and achieved, too, that seemed rather like the effect of inspiration than of his own unassisted intelligence, for there was decidedly much more of cleverness in it than he was in the habit of displaying upon ordinary occasions.

As soon as the important notification was received that the invitation was honoured by the royal acceptance, then Mr. Cuthbert, amidst a multitude of other important cares, all claiming and all receiving his earnest attention, began to devote some very anxious hours, both of the day and night, to the consideration of the dress in which his beautiful wife was to appear.

He had asked, with all the gallant ardour of an enamoured bridegroom, that he might be permitted to choose the character she should personate—a favour which Harriet readily granted, well knowing that the fashionable artist who was alone permitted to furnish her dresses, would take care that, whatever the orders might be, the result should be something supremely elegant.

Having obtained his lady's promise that she would postpone ordering her dress till he had taken a little time to meditate upon the subject, he set himself to the task with as much earnestness as if the fate of Europe had been at stake ; and, to do him justice, he considered the question exactly in the most practical and judicious point of view possible.

"My object," thought he, "is to lessen, by every possible means in my power, the feeling of distance and restraint which now paralyses the faculties of my beautiful wife, in all her intercourse with the Regent. Could this be removed, everything would go well—and removed it must be."

It was not very quickly, even after a very bright idea had suggested itself, that he had the courage to decide upon it ; but at length he did decide, and the result was as follows :

"Well, Harriet, dearest !" he said, on the morning after an almost sleepless night had enabled him to make up his mind upon the doubtful question, "we will go to Madame ——— this morning ; but you must promise not to ask a single question. And remember, my love, that whatever she furnishes on this occasion is at my cost ; but you are not to know what your dress is to be till the moment you put it on."

"Oh ! do tell me something about it before that !" she exclaimed, very beseechingly.

"Indulge me, my sweet love !" he replied. "If you insist upon it," he continued, "I will certainly tell you ; but you will do me a very great favour if you will not ask."

"Then I will not ask," she said ; "and I am ready to go with you as soon as the carriage can come to the door."

Her compliance was rewarded not only by a profusion of tender thanks, but by his saying, "Now then, my love, I will prove to you, that I am not a very hard-hearted tyrant, for although the dress in which you are to receive your company, and remain among them for a few hours, is to be kept a secret, I mean that you shall put on a second dress, in which you are to accompany the Regent into the supper-room ; and the form and materials of this shall not only be no secret to you, but whatever your taste can suggest as likely to add to its becoming and elegant effect, shall immediately be adopted."

This assurance might certainly have consoled a less reasonable woman than Mrs. Cuthbert ; and she set off upon this interesting expedition, not only in the most perfect good-humour, but considerably more amused than displeased, at the mystery which enveloped a part of it.

Mrs. Cuthbert immediately perceived, upon being ushered into the room where the chief of the establishment received her more illustrious clients, that she had already received a confidential visit from Mr. Cuthbert. There was a little quiet

nod, and a little quiet smile, on both sides, that rendered the fact quite indisputable.

The business of the meeting—that part of it at least in which Mrs. Cuthbert was to take an acknowledged part—was soon opened ; for the time of Madame ——— was much too precious to permit her wasting it in idle preliminaries, had the customer been a lady as notoriously admired by all the sovereigns of Europe as Mrs. Cuthbert was by one. “Elizabethan, you think, sir ?” said Madame, in answer to an opening observation from Mr. Cuthbert.

“Decidedly !” was the reply. “Have you any drawings you can show us ?”

The table before them was instantly covered with the prettiest imaginable designs of ruffs and cardinals, satins and brocades, stomachers and flounces, hats à la Stuart, and caps à la Bolena ; together with every conceivable and inconceivable variety of every species of female decoration supposed, correctly or incorrectly, to belong to that period.

At length, after rather more discussion than Madame would have thought reasonable, had not two dresses been ordered instead of one, it was decided that the one which the fair young hostess was to assume for the purpose of marshalling her royal guest to the supper, should be that of Anne Boleyn. The dress, which was of white satin, with a cap of black velvet ornamented with pearls, was at that time familiar to the eye, and greatly popular as the very perfection of elegance, from having been worn by a very lovely actress, during Mrs. Siddons’ last representations of the part of Queen Katherine. Mrs. Cuthbert was delighted with the choice her husband had made for her ; and smilingly told him, that she felt no anxiety concerning the mysterious costume she was to wear during the earlier part of the evening, as it was impossible that one who could choose so well should ever choose amiss.

During the interval which elapsed between sending out the invitations and the evening of the fête, Mr. Cuthbert’s handsome old house in Cavendish Square underwent many ornamental and one rather important alteration. This last consisted in opening a communication between the dining-room and the large library, which stretched out behind it across the court, to the distance of forty feet.

This room, originally intended for a picture-gallery, was lighted from the top, and was very lofty. The moment the splendid idea of adding this apartment to the dining-room, in order to permit the whole company to sit down to supper in one room, and yet to preserve a high table in the smaller apartment for the Regent, occurred to the vain Amphitryon, he became so

enamoured of it as to be almost incapable of thinking for five minutes together of anything else.

It would make, beyond all doubt, the finest private supper-room in London ; and this was a species of pre-eminence which caused every fibre of his frame to dilate with satisfaction. He had, however, sufficient sobriety of judgment left to call in an able architect to counsel, before he gave his orders for perforating the wall ; and, fortunately for his peace of mind, this scientific gentleman pronounced that it might be done, if the operations were very carefully proceeded with, and no expense spared to render the superstructure secure.

This was rendered the more easy, from the fact, that the library had no building over it ; the greenhouse, which has been already mentioned, being on the opposite side of the court, which was so large that, in addition to these two sky-lit structures, and the passage which led between them, it opened behind them into a wide area, which served as a back-yard to the coach-house and stables.

It was not without considerable difficulty that this said architect, whose judgment was so gladly hailed as unimpeachable, when he pronounced the perilous junction of the dining-room and library to be possible, persuaded his ambitious employer to believe, that another splendid idea for opening a communication between the new supper-room and the conservatory was not so ; but the architect was not only a clever architect, but a clever man, for when he perceived the fine fever of decoration rolling so ominously in Mr. Cuthbert's eyes, as to make him appear capable of perforating every wall in his house if he could but be certain of producing a more imposing effect thereby, he abandoned the vain attempt of pointing out to his understanding the peril of the measures he proposed, and brought him to reason at once, by pointing out to him, that the exhibiting his beautiful conservatory to his guests while they were at supper, would entirely destroy the enchanting effect of its chequered light and shade upon their return to the ball-room.

This settled the question at once ; and left the anxious mind of Mr. Cuthbert at liberty to devote itself almost wholly to the important task of covering up his antique volumes in undulating silken draperies of white and crimson, and converting the dark walled chamber thereby, not only into one of the most brilliant-looking banqueting rooms ever seen, but forming it, with its multitude of lights, its bright colours, and its long line of glittering table ornaments, and still more glittering company, into one of the most brilliant vistas ever prepared to regale a pampered royal eye.

Harriet meanwhile, though not quite so busy, was scarcely less occupied than Mr. Cuthbert himself. Having never watched the preparations for receiving royalty before, she took it for granted that nothing was going on in her own house in any degree more extravagant or more troublesome than what would of necessity be going on in every other whose owners were fortunate enough to stand sufficiently high in the world of fashion to receive the Regent.

She liked all that was going on exceedingly ; she liked the idea of her beautiful dress, and felt a very pleasant consciousness that it would make her look prettier, a great deal, than she had ever looked before. She liked the fine supper-room too, though it is not greatly to the honour of her boasted loyalty to confess, that she thought very little about the effect it might produce upon the particular individual eyes of her royal visitor ; but she felt that the whole scene together would be much more like what she had read about in the *Arabian Nights* than anything she had yet seen ; and once, when all this youthful folly was at its height, she actually murmured to herself, " Well ! after all, nobody can say, that there is not some pleasure in being mistress of all this ! "

But even this strongest paroxysm of youthful giddiness still left her safe and sound, high and dry, upon the solid footing of common sense, compared with the state of mind of her infatuated husband.

Harriet, poor young thing, had not the slightest idea that the expense of all that was going forward was not only totally out of proportion to her husband's income, but might have been commented upon as an instance of preposterous folly and extravagance in one whose revenues exceeded his twenty-fold ; and rarely did the short-sighted judgment of lookers-on err more egregiously than on the present occasion ; the general idea being, that the whole of this ridiculously splendid affair was the result of beautiful Mrs. Cuthbert's unbounded vanity and extravagance, against which the doting fondness of her old husband could make no resistance, as might, indeed, easily have been foreseen, from the pitiable blindness with which he permitted her to expose herself to the observation of " the world," by her perfectly outrageous flirtation with the Prince Regent.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE great day came, as all days, great and small, are sure to do, with a punctuality that sets an excellent example. When there is no restriction in expense, restriction in time matters

very little in London. Everything was finished and ready by the appointed hour—nay, even at a very soothing and comfortable little interval before it, save and except the expected dresses of the fair hostess.

Harriet herself began to get a little fidgetty; and her maid Selby was in a perfect agony; but they wronged Madame ———. The stars themselves, to use the beautiful phrase of Wordsworth, are not more punctual. Exactly as the clock struck ten, a couple of porters arrived with a pair of wicker treasuries, each one containing a dress with all its appropriate appurtenances.

Mr. Cuthbert, who was already dressed, was walking up and down his lady's room in a state of mind in no degree more tranquil than that of the furiously angry abigail; but tempers of both master and maid were soothed into instant tranquillity by the entrance of these wicker and oil-skin repositories. Mr. Cuthbert, with his own elegant hands, assisted in opening the first of the two that was deposited on the floor.

"This is it!" he exclaimed, in a sort of ecstasy. "Never mind the other, Selby! You can take out that afterwards, to be ready to put on, as I have explained to you, during the last dance before supper. Send all the people away, can't you?—they may come back to-morrow for the cases."

Another moment sufficed to explain the mystery. A dress of very elegant materials, but of very simple form, was drawn forth by the dainty hands of Mrs. Selby, and displayed before the wondering eyes of her mistress. It consisted of a very full short petticoat, the fabric of which it was composed being very rich satin, but the colour of that dark, sombre tint of which the homely duffle garments of the west-country peasants were generally made, before the high-pressure cotton-mills had caused all local peculiarities of costume to give place to their patterned calicos. The upper part of the dress was of very delicate cambric, and bore a picturesque approximation to the short-sleeved under-garment of the females of all lands.

But the most remarkable feature of the dress was a small red cloak, such as little Red Riding-Hood has made immortal throughout the world of Romance, but which has the more solemn stamp of historical renown accorded to it in the Duchy of Cornwall. The head-dress was a somewhat fantastical little black hat, fastened under the chin by a blue ribbon, while the dainty and diminutive black shoes, though the material was black satin, had buckles high up on the instep, and heels that marked a very remote period in the art of shoe-making. But the whole dress, such as it was, would decidedly have required an interpreter, had it not been made familiar to the London

world by a very popular picture recently exhibited, which bore in the catalogue the title of—"The Cornish Heroine."

Mrs. Cuthbert certainly contemplated this dress with more surprise than satisfaction. She was by no means ignorant of the tradition which attributed the safety of the Cornish coast, at a moment of threatened invasion, to the imposing appearance of a multitude of red cloaks, so arranged as to make their wearers mistaken for cohorts of the stouter sex; but she could trace no connection between this old story, and her present position as the honoured mistress of a mansion favoured by the presence of the Sovereign.

Had poor little Harriet been less profoundly ignorant of the fact that her sobriquet among all the fine folks she expected was the "Pearl of the Duchy," she might have understood the jest better.

But on this point her husband had not the least intention of enlightening her. He felt quite sure that the well-known costume would suggest to his Royal Highness the pleasant idea that his fair hostess was, in a pretty, modest way, coquetting with him; an idea which the watchful husband was only too sure had never been suggested by her conduct before; and from this he hoped would arise such an increased, though perfectly innocent familiarity of manner on the part of the Prince, as might remove the shyness from which it was evident, as Mr. Cuthbert thought, she still suffered in his presence. But not a syllable of all this did he say to her. He watched her pretty keenly, however, as she contemplated her unintelligible dress, and then said, with an air of good-humour, which he was quite sure would restore hers, if in truth she had lost it—

"I am afraid this pretty dress is too simple to please your taste, dearest? But I must explain to you, my sweet Harriet, that it is always thus when ladies appear in two dresses; the first is always chosen with a view to setting off to the greatest possible advantage the second, which, of course, is always intended to be superb and striking. I flatter myself that you will find this simple dress extremely becoming, though it was my object to let it be removed as far as possible from splendid.

Long before he had ceased speaking, the lovely face of his wife was again radiant with smiles, and she exclaimed, "I have no doubt in the world that I shall like it extremely, Mr. Cuthbert."

"Now, then, I will leave you in the hands of Selby, my sweet love," he replied; "but before I go, let me once more entreat you to remember, that it is your most especial duty to devote all your thoughts and attention to the entertainment of the royal guest who so greatly honours us. And, above all, dearest Harriet,

fail not to remember the instructions I have given you relative to the manner of presenting yourself to his Royal Highness, after you have changed your dress, for the purpose of conducting him to his place at the supper-table. Of course, I shall walk before him—backward you know—but it is you who must lead him to his place.”

Having once more received her promise to do all he had directed her, he took his leave, and Selby and her lady were left standing in judgment over the picturesque though unostentatious garments of “the Pearl of the Duchy.”

“I don’t like it at all, ma’am,” said Selby, very gloomily.

“It is lucky for me that my ringlets do not want much help, Selby,” said Mrs. Cuthbert, laughing; “for you look a great deal too angry to take much pains about them.”

“I don’t like the dress at all, ma’am,” reiterated the indignant abigail, knitting her brows.

“Then, I suppose, I must show you something that you will like,” said her mistress, with more of childish gaiety than courtly dignity in her manner. And, as she spoke, she drew forth the splendid dress of Anne Boleyn, and laid it upon the sofa. It was not within the compass of satin, lace, and pearls, to be more elegant than the costume which now regaled the eyes of the fastidious Selby. Her mood changed instantly, and she looked taller by an inch as she contemplated the rich draperies which she was to have the honourable task of arranging.

“This is quite another sort of thing!” she said, bending over the sofa, and touching, with profound respect, the exquisite lace flounces, and the tassels of oriental pearls which were mixed with it. “I understand it now, ma’am—I understand it perfectly; it is all for effect, and I dare say my master is quite right. Pretty much vexed some of the fine ladies will be, I will engage for it, who will have been enjoying, for an hour or two, the notion of overtopping you, ma’am. Pretty provoked they will be, when you come before them in this. They may find, in more ways than one, perhaps, that it is no such an easy thing to overtop Mrs. Cuthbert, though she has not got a title. My master is not a young man; I don’t say he is, and I never did say so; but for understanding how to set things off, I don’t believe there is a gentleman in the three kingdoms as can match him!”

Fortunately, the fingers of Mrs. Selby kept pace with her tongue, which prevented this repentant bust of eloquence from impeding the business in which she was engaged; and as the shortness of the time taken in putting on a lady’s dress is in exact proportion to the skill bestowed upon the making it, Madame ———’s Cornish costume was completely arranged

several minutes before it was necessary for Mrs. Cuthbert to descend to her receiving-room.

Yet it must be confessed that these minutes were not quite idly spent. When Selby stepped back, as having put her last finishing touch, Harriet stepped forward to the Psyche glass, and certainly did think that she had never looked so pretty in her life. Perhaps she was right. Her complexion was a little, only a little, heightened, and her eyes sparkled more brightly than usual, at the consciousness not only of her own beauty, but of the distinguished and honoured position in which she found herself. She was to receive—she, the so lately unknown and humble Harriet Hartwell—was to receive as a guest, the son of George the Third!—the eldest son, himself a sovereign!

Her heart certainly did swell with pride and pleasure; and she not only forgot at that moment all her weary tête-à-têtes with her aged husband, but also the sick longing she had so often felt to behold again the faces of her dear parents and her much-loved sister. Let it be remembered, however, that had she comprehended the real position in which she stood—had some true voice told her that the Prince Regent was as much in love with her as it was possible he could be with any woman, and that it pleased him to know that all the world (his world) were perfectly aware of it; could she have guessed that her vain old husband was more than willing—was desirous, ardently desirous—that she should listen with so much gentleness to this unholy love, as might persuade the royal, gay Lothario, that it was returned, not even the costly robes in which she was to invest herself anon would have prevented the outraged young creature from rushing from her husband's house, in the hope of finding her way back to that of her father.

Having done her so much justice, we may now follow her, as, with light step and beating heart, she descended the stairs to the drawing-rooms.

The scene that greeted her there seemed, to her fancy, to be much more like one of magical delusion than sober reality. It is a melancholy fact for the givers of fine parties in splendid rooms, but fact it is, that the long-studied and costly decorations of a fine suite of apartments are never seen to such advantage after the arrival of the company for whose use and benefit they are prepared, as before. When Harriet walked into the really beautifully-decorated rooms, which were now, in many respects, much more richly furnished than she had ever seen them before, she felt as if the whole show was perfectly new to her. The brilliancy of the lighting; the graceful arrangement and lavish profusion of the flowers; the soft shade and delicate twilight of the beautiful conservatory; to-

gether with the elegant and fanciful decorations bestowed on the canopied and carpeted elevation prepared, very nearly in the form of a throne, for the Regent, produced an effect that was altogether dazzling. Having advanced a few steps into the second room, from whence the whole arrangement was perfectly seen, she stopped short, clasped her hands together, and exclaimed, with all the simplicity of her age and character, "Goodness me! what a paradise!"

"And you are an angel made on purpose to inhabit and adorn it!" said her gallant husband, emerging from behind the richly flowing new drapery of one of his gold-coloured satin curtains, and quite forgetting to correct her phraseology.

"Upon my word, Mr. Cuthbert," she replied, placing herself beside him, "I not only never saw anything so beautiful, but I never before thought it possible that rooms could be made to look so divinely bright and elegant. Do you think that the Prince Regent ever saw anything quite so beautiful as this before? At any rate Carlton House is nothing to it."

"No, my dear; you are perfectly correct. There is nothing at Carlton House so brightly beautiful as these rooms look to-night. But you must remember, my sweet Harriet, that our kind-hearted Prince will not be contented with his reception, if all the welcome we give him is shown by the splendour of our furniture and the brilliancy of our wax-lights. You must endeavour to assume a manner less distant and less shy towards him. Those who know him best all agree in saying, that from persons whom he favours with his personal friendship, he expects confidence and friendship in return."

This was the last little lecture on the subject which Mr. Cuthbert had any opportunity of delivering that night to the attentive ears of his beautiful wife; for, as he uttered the last word, the doors of the saloon were thrown open, and a group of noble individuals announced, whose entrance was followed by that of a stream of fanciful and gorgeous figures, which ceased not to flow onward till the rooms were as full as it was the intention of their judicious owner that they should be, and then the splendid pageant was completed by the presence of the Prince.

The reception of this illustrious personage for the first time under his roof was an event which, under any circumstance, must have caused considerable emotion to Mr. Cuthbert; but now all other feelings were merged in one; all his anxiety at that moment was to discover the effect produced upon the royal visitor by the costume of Mrs. Cuthbert.

Never had a plotting gentleman more cause to pay himself compliments on the brilliant success of his own inventions than Mr. Cuthbert had at that moment.

The portly Regent came sweeping on into the rooms—which seemed to blush and glow with smiles, and lights, and brilliant colouring, as if all they contained of animate and inanimate conspired to give him welcome, with that sort of look of satisfied indifference—if such an expression may be used—which ought, of course, to repay the most elaborate preparations; but no sooner had his somewhat lack-lustre eyes caught the simply-clad little figure of his beautiful hostess, than the whole royal countenance was illuminated as suddenly as the cupola of St. Peter's at Easter. He stretched out both his hands towards her; and when she curtsied low, as she placed her hands in his to receive him, he certainly did look, for a moment, exceedingly inclined to impress a paternal kiss upon her brow, to reward her for the pretty compliment she had paid his dukedom.

Whatever else there might be, there certainly was no mixture of dulness in the composition of the Prince, who at that time reigned as Regent of England. All the pretty playful sort of coquetry manifested by the allusion so clearly made by this well-known costume to the proof of admiration he had first bestowed upon her by the charming epithet of "Pearl of his Duchy," came upon him in full force as he contemplated the simple attire by which she had chosen to distinguish herself from all the splendour around her. Such a little manœuvre as this could hardly fail of being piquant in any very pretty woman; but from the apparent insensibility, or rather unconsciousness of all tender meaning, with which Mrs. Cuthbert had hitherto rather heard than listened to all he had amused himself by addressing to her, it was greatly more so.

Little did the innocent-hearted Harriet guess how many eyes, more clear-sighted than her own, were contemplating the grateful smiles and blushes with which she repaid the flattering condescension of her illustrious guest as he kept possession of one of her little hands, while they followed the low-bowing Mr. Cuthbert to the stately seat allotted to him.

Was there a single individual in all that assembly who did not attribute her assumption of the humble dress she wore to high-vaulting ambition?—No.

She was herself the only person present who knew not that, for weeks past, it had been supreme bon-ton, when speaking of her, to sink her name in that of the "Pearl of the Duchy," and therefore it was, that she was the only one ignorant of all the meaning attached to her brown petticoat and little red cloak.

Mr. Cuthbert was in raptures. The party was as animated as the preparation for their reception was brilliant. Never had the Regent appeared in more happy spirits; nobody could say he looked languid—nobody could say he looked bored. He

sat, smiling, with Mrs. Cuthbert by his side ; he walked, smiling, with Mrs. Cuthbert on his arm ; till, at length, probably for the sake of a little variety, he suddenly said to her, " I must see you dance in that costume, dear lady ! Your feet are divine in that chaussure."

And, as he well knew that nobody would venture to approach for the purpose of asking her to dance while he himself continued to engross her attention, he added, " I will choose you a partner myself ;" and, beckoning a gentleman, who was at no very great distance from them, he despatched him with a message to a certain young scion of a ducal house, who was celebrated for the style in which he danced the French contredanse, or quadrille, which was at that time as much the fashion as the polka is now.

The summons was eagerly obeyed ; a set stood up immediately in front of the Regent's seat, and the " Pearl of the Duchy" acquitted herself admirably, considering that her first lessons in this foreign measure had been taken privately in her own drawing-room since her marriage.

The Regent's eye followed her almost incessantly, and with a greater degree of animation than he often manifested for so long a time together at that period of his existence. But the fair Pearl, or rather her ambitious husband, had very cleverly found means of amusing him that were perfectly successful.

The watchful eye of Mr. Cuthbert marked all this at safe and respectful distance, and though satisfied—nay, more than satisfied—though perfectly delighted at the great success which had rewarded his ingenious idea, he began to fear that it had been almost too successful, and that there might be danger that good-humour so brilliant, and gay spirits so long excited, might languish and fade before the end of the entertainment, which, if it did not conclude as brilliantly as it began, might be criticised as half a failure, instead of being cited as the most successful fête of the season.

To guard against this terrible catastrophe, Mr. Cuthbert very judiciously determined, while watching the gay eye of his " Royal Master," as it followed the light step of Harriet in the dance, that, when that dance was over, that gay eye should seek the pretty peasant in vain, which would not only spare the royal spirits the fatigue of reiterating the expression of the admiration so evidently felt, but make her reappearance in another character the more effective, from the suddenness with which she was lost sight of in this.

Carefully waiting, therefore, for the moment the quadrille should cease, he contrived, for the first time since the arrival of the Regent, to be within reach of speaking to her. He only pronounced her name, however ; but when she turned towards

him on hearing it, he gave her an intelligent look, which conveyed the very agreeable information that she was immediately to retire to her dressing-room.

Never did a young beauty receive notice that she might withdraw herself from admiring eyes so joyfully ; for, in truth, she was desperately weary. Had she been dancing all the time, it would have been otherwise, for she dearly loved dancing, and could endure the fatigue of it with as much perseverance as the stoutest lass that could be found among the peasant girls whose dress she had imitated. But the sitting up beside her venerated guest, with attention ever on the 'qui vive,' to listen to any and every word he might be pleased to speak to her, was really and truly a penance almost greater than she could bear with sufficient strength of mind and body to insure her from the dreadful danger of either yawning or looking in the least degree as weary as she felt.

With most alert obedience, therefore, she gave an intelligent look in return for the intelligent look she had received, and glided out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AND then it was that, if any fair creature present, either old or young, fat or thin, felt at the bottom of her heart either the wish or the hope that old Mr. Cuthbert's fête, and his Cornish Pearl inclusively, might come to an untimely end, and be cited ever after as a total failure—then it was that such hoppers and wishers might have discerned some little chance that they might be gratified. No sooner was the quadrille ended than the Regent, who, leaning upon the arms of his chair, had thrown himself forward to watch it, laid himself back, and closed his eyes, much as he might if it had been his deliberate intention to go to sleep ; and many a glance was given and returned, and many an ominous little shake of the head, that plainly spoke of the possibility of people being fairly tired to death.

The voice of Mr. Cuthbert, however, offering some well-known favourite refreshment, caused the royal eyes to open again ; but, the said refreshment graciously accepted, Mr. Cuthbert cleverly withdrew himself from before them, lest some inquiry should follow, relative to his lady, which he might have felt embarrassed how to answer. And then, again, the above-mentioned hoppers and wishers saw something well calculated to raise their spirits, for it is not easy to imagine any fat face looking more

thoroughly out of humour than did that of the Royal Regent of England, upon looking round and perceiving that the pretty creature who had been giving such fascinating proofs of being wholly devoted to him, had absconded.

He knit his brows, and looked as alarmingly like Henry the Eighth as possible. There was a circle round him, but it was a distant one; no person seemed courageous enough to approach him; and first one royal leg was put forth, and then the other, giving threatening indication of some cruel thoughts of taking himself off, even at the very moment when the announcement of supper was beginning to be expected.

"I am sure I shall not stay, if he goes," said one noble lady.

"I confess I thought he would not stay very late," said another.

"I think you are mistaken; I do not believe he is going," said a less sanguine-spirited third.

But, in the next moment, hope seemed changed to certainty, for royalty arose, paused for a moment on the raised step on which his seat was placed, and then laying his hand upon one of three arms, which had suddenly protruded themselves to assist him, he descended from his state, and made one or two very decisive steps towards the door.

Had Mr. Cuthbert seen him at that moment, it is extremely probable he would have fallen down in a fit of apoplexy on the floor; but, fortunately for the feelings of the company, he did not, being just then rather anxiously waiting at the door of his lady's dressing-room, that he might look at her first, and accompany her to the ball-room afterwards.

Never, assuredly, was an entrée better timed than that of Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert upon this occasion. The Regent had certainly moved sluggishly, but nevertheless he had traversed one room, and had very nearly made his way through half the second, when the door of that second opened, and the Cornish peasant, with whom at that moment he felt inexpressibly disgusted and angry, appeared before him, no longer bedight, however, in the garb of a peasant girl, but dressed with almost regal splendour, and looking, in his eyes, quite as lovely as ever her unfortunate prototype did in those of the monarch who controlled her destiny.

Never did a face undergo a more sudden metamorphosis. The hopes and wishers above alluded to soon ceased to look at him, declaring that the affair was altogether quite ridiculous.

A prince of slower faculties than the Regent might not so quickly have caught, interpreted, and appropriated Mrs. Cuthbert's change of apparel; might not so instantly have understood all that it seemed intended it should say to him. But it was many years since the Regent had felt so decidedly in love

as he did at that moment. It was not only her beauty, it was her wit, her finesse, her delicate coquetry, that enchanted him; for, as he remembered her manner and her conversation, as it had been in the earlier part of their acquaintance, when scarcely her extreme beauty could atone to him for the evident want of that touching coquetry which a more passionate desire to enchant him would have inspired—when he remembered this, and compared it with the beautiful ingenuity with which she had studied how best to please him now, he could not but feel that he had, at last, succeeded in thawing the coldness and conquering the reserve which had for a time protected her from the fascinations by which nature and fortune united had enabled him to conquer more hearts than any prince, save some particularly attractive Grand Turk, had ever conquered before.

The good-humour which these pleasant thoughts inspired was indeed radiant, and the evident rekindling of friendly intimacy which followed, in the manner of many of the noble new friends who had honoured this entertainment with their presence; the flattering glances and the whispered exclamations of admiration at the new costume; and finally, the sudden pause and loudly-uttered applause of the Prince, on his reaching the supper-room, altogether made the few moments between the re-entrance of Mrs. Cuthbert and the arrangement of the guests at the gorgeous and ample board prepared for them, the happiest of her husband's life.

From this time to the final moment of the banquet, when the Regent at length rose from the table and made his late retreat, everything wore precisely the aspect which the triumphant master of the revels most desired; the rich wines flowed freely, and the whole scene appeared as joyous as it was brilliant. The most exclusively elegant portion of the company, perhaps, followed the example of the Regent, and walked from the supper-room to their carriages; but a much larger number returned to the ball-room, for the purpose of enjoying what many of them considered as decidedly the pleasantest part of the entertainment.

It is by no means improbable that the lovely personification of Anne Boleyn was one of these. In addition to the consciousness that every eye was looking at her with admiration, she enjoyed the delightful sensation of rest after labour. Poor, innocent Harriet! Her exertions in the cause of loyalty had been unremitting, and now she felt herself as much at liberty to dance, talk, laugh, and be happy, as any other lady of nineteen in the room. Her enjoyment would doubtless have been greater still, had some of her guests been of older and more intimate acquaintance, but even without this, it was all very pleasant, and very gratifying to her youthful vanity; for scarcely a

voice addressed her without offering the homage of a compliment, either to herself or her fête; and, what was better still, Mr. Cuthbert himself seemed to have been charmed out of all his solemnity, and to be in such exceedingly good-humour with her, and with everything about him, that she almost forgot how very impossible she had lately found it to be even perfectly at her ease in his society.

The generality of the guests who remained after supper seemed to enjoy the dance almost as much as the young hostess herself; but there was one singular exception to this general appearance of hilarity in the person of a young gentleman who had chosen a dress very closely imitating that worn by Mr. John Kemble, in *Hamlet*.

Whether it were that this gentleman deemed it proper to make his manner and aspect accord with this "suit of solemn black," or that he really was himself a very melancholy personage, it was difficult to decide.

Another peculiarity of his appearance was, that his curling and abundant hair was almost flaxen, which, as his eyes and complexion were dark, produced a singular and by no means pleasing effect. But for this strange sort of incongruity in his appearance, he must have been accounted more than commonly handsome, for his stature and form were very fine, and his features perfectly well-formed and regular, though marred by that expression of real or assumed melancholy which has been already mentioned.

This dark-browed, but light-haired young man, in his solemn suit of velvet and bugles, had more than once attracted the attention of Mrs. Cuthbert in the course of the evening, partly because his general appearance had something singular in it, partly because she fancied he followed her very strangely with his dark eyes, whenever he could do so unobserved, but that he suddenly looked another way whenever he perceived that she was watching him, and partly because he seemed to know no one, to take no part whatever in anything that was going on, and to move occasionally from place to place in so gliding and ghost-like a style, that she told her maid Selby, when she was undressing her, that she had more than once fancied herself haunted by a black ghost during the evening.

But though she had failed in learning the name of this mysterious personage, she had made some inquiries concerning him, the answer to which had rather increased her curiosity than satisfied it. The first person to whom she addressed herself, in the hope of learning something about him, was old Lady Maxwell, justly celebrated for knowing everything and everybody.

"Can you tell me, Lady Maxwell," said Harriet, almost immediately after the company had returned to the ball-room from

the supper-table—"can you tell me who that young man is in black velvet and bugles?"

"Oh! that is the young poet that all the people are making such a fuss about. Mr. Cuthbert was quite right to invite him, for it is quite the fashion to do so," replied the old lady.

"And what is his name, Lady Maxwell? If it were not for his light hair, I should say he was most wonderfully like a person that I used to know formerly very well. I hope you can tell me his name?"

"His name, my dear Mrs. Cuthbert, is Monkley, or Monkton, or Mountly, I am not quite certain which, but I know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that it begins with an M, and that it was a prize poem at Cambridge that has just brought him into such immense fashion."

This silenced, if it did not satisfy Mrs. Cuthbert, at least for the moment, and she was dancing so incessantly for more than an hour afterwards, that she forgot all about him; but then, happening to have caught sight of him, as he stood looking at her from behind one of the columns of the conservatory, she went up to her husband, who was seated at no great distance from her, and pointing out the object of her curiosity, asked him if he could tell her what his name was.

"The name of the young Hamlet, my sweet love?" returned the now more than ever devoted husband: "oh! yes, dearest, I can tell you a great deal more than his name—I can tell you everything about him. It was the Marquis of L—— who brought him here, for I must confess I had never heard of him before, or else most assuredly I should have invited him. And you positively must make his acquaintance, my dear love, for we must ask him to dinner. The Marquis of L—— says that people are actually fighting for him, and that he is decidedly the greatest poet of the age, and that you know, my dear, is as much as to say, that all people of fashion must notice him."

"But what is his name, Mr. Cuthbert?" reiterated Harriet.

"His name, dearest? I think his name is Martin, or Martriot, or something of that sort; but there will be no difficulty whatever in finding that out, when we send him the invitation to dinner. But you must not talk any more about poetry now, my love, for here is the Duke of —— coming, I am quite sure, to ask you to dance the next quadrille."

So the eventful evening ended without Harriet's having been able to discover the name of the fair-haired poet who had personated the Prince of Denmark.

* * * * *

As the clock struck four, the last carriage drove from the door, and the master and mistress of the now rapidly-darkened and deserted mansion retired to their respective dressing-

rooms, to prepare themselves for the rest which they certainly wanted, though the spirits of both were still too greatly excited to permit them very quickly to find it.

Mr. Cuthbert, however, as he lay awake upon his pillow, could hardly wish that sleep should come and chase the memory of the brilliant triumph which had attended the experiment he had made. What man, having a darling object in view, and firmly believing that he had just reached the achievement of it, ever wished for sleep? Few men in London lay down that night with so completely contented a mind as Mr. Cuthbert. In giving this splendid fête, he had had several objects in view, and he believed he had attained them all. Nor was he at all likely to find himself mistaken. He had for ever enrolled his name among those who had given the most brilliant fêtes of the season:

"Not Jove himself has power upon the post."

It was done. The Regent had been there. The Regent had stayed supper, and eaten "*comme quatre*." The Regent had laughed repeatedly—nay, had laughed heartily, within a very few minutes of his departure, and after the clock had struck two; the Regent had made exactly all the love to his wife that he wished him to make, and that was a great deal; and, better still, far better still, the Regent had been as rude as a bear to more than one acknowledged favourite, who had ventured to attempt a little infraction of the tête-à-tête with which his royal condescension had been pleased to honour his young hostess during a considerable portion of the night.

All this was excellent; but there was one feature of that night's adventures which was perhaps more satisfactory still. It was pretty nearly impossible that Mr. Cuthbert, or indeed anybody else, could doubt that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent was far too much enamoured of the Pearl of his Duchy, to refuse her any reasonable request that she might be pleased to make to him, and many an eye was kept awake that night, while the lips belonging to it were discussing how far it was likely she might be able to push her influence.

Many ladies, old enough to have considerable experience in such matters, declared it to be their opinion that Mrs. Cuthbert was much too young to retain, or even to have, any real power over him; while many equally experienced gentlemen gave it as their deliberate conviction that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent was too utterly incapable of feeling any attachment at all, to make it in the least probable that this whim should endure beyond a month or two.

But all agreed that, during the interval that did endure, nobody could reasonably doubt that the "Pearl of the Duchy,"

who had shown herself so able and so willing to enact the part of Anne Boleyn, might ennoble her husband and enrich herself, provided she was not unreasonable in her demands.

In all, or in most of this, Mr. Cuthbert would have agreed in his heart, had he been present when these opinions were spoken ; but the one thing that he thought and felt to be of more value than all the rest, was the Prince Regent's altered tone towards himself.

Of this, however, no mortal living besides himself was at all aware, for it was not conspicuously displayed ; but it was such, nevertheless, as to satisfy the watchful courtier that if, after all, his silly wife should continue to declare herself incapable of abusing the condescension of her sovereign, by asking favours of him, he, the lawful husband, lord and master of the Pearl, might ask the favour he so greatly coveted, himself.

Such being his well-founded persuasion, what thought was there likely to cross his mind, that could in any way be able to endanger the fulness of his content ? The two thousand four hundred pounds which his fête, and all the preparations for it, had cost him ? Oh, no ; Mr. Cuthbert knew the condition of his timber, and the condition of his property in general, much too well to fear that the paying off this trifling debt would trouble him.

And had his imagination, or his experience, or even his conscience, whispered to him any of the observations that might be made, and were made, on his permitting his very young and very ignorant wife to expose her name to all that would, and all that must, be said respecting the very obvious manner by which, in both the dresses she had chosen, she had sought to captivate her royal guest, would this have troubled him ? Oh, no ; for Mr. Cuthbert knew the world of fashion much too well to fear that such remarks would do him any serious injury, provided always that the objects for the sake of which he provoked them were obtained.

In short, very few old gentlemen ever gave an outrageously extravagant ball, and then fell asleep after it, as perfectly well satisfied with themselves and everybody else as Mr. Cuthbert did on the night I have been describing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHILE all this was going on in London, scenes that were quite as agreeable to the parties concerned, though certainly of a very different nature, were taking place in the quiet village of Pen-

morris. No legal, carriage-building, or dress-making delays having occurred to retard the wedding of Godfrey Marshdale and Mary Hartwell, it took place, to the entire satisfaction of all the parties concerned, about a week after the fête above described.

The only disagreeable feelings which mixed themselves with the universal joy at the Vicarage arose from the disagreeable fact that Harriet had not yet answered the letter which had announced to her the news of its being immediately about to take place; and from some slight sensation of alarm on the part of the bride, lest Mrs. Maberly Montagu's boldly venturing to be present both at the wedding and the breakfast which was to follow it, might be so reported to the lady of the manor as to seriously endanger her hopes of succeeding to the property; but Mrs. Maberly Montagu was in no humour to listen to such cautious reasonings, and replied to an affectionate remonstrance of the bride, who, even at the moment that they were setting off for the church, recommended her to take a little walk in the park, instead of entering it, by saying, "And so lose the sight of all the village children and their showers of roses and lilacs? No, Miss Mary Hartwell, I will do no such thing!" And accordingly, she not only went to church with them, but had very much the appearance of being intended for one of the bridesmaids, for she stood side by side with Susan Marshdale, who was the only person officially appointed to that honour.

After the breakfast, however, Mrs. Montagu quietly retreated to the Manor House, while the real bridesmaid accompanied her happy brother, and her dearly-beloved new sister, on a week's tour to one of the pretty watering-places of Devonshire. So, altogether, the wedding was a gay wedding, and a very happy one; nevertheless, there was one guest present at it, who appeared to be so little either happy or gay, that if his presence could not truly be said to have cast a gloom over the rest of the party, it certainly added nothing to their enjoyment.

This seemingly unsympathetic personage was Charles Marshdale. He had, when first invited, made some difficulties about being present at the wedding, pleading engagements and occupations of various kinds. Though always an affectionate son and brother, Charles Marshdale had not of late been a confidential one.

His sister Susan was the only member of his family who had the least suspicion of the passionate love which he had conceived for Harriet Hartwell, and even her suspicion of the fact had arisen solely from her own observations, for never had he confided to her a single thought or feeling on the subject.

There was, in fact, a good deal that was peculiar in the character and temper of this young man. He alone of all his race

really suffered from the sort of equivocal station which his family held in the neighbourhood. He alone knew much of, or cared at all for, the long and unbroken line of descent which he had traced up to ancestors who, instead of tilling the soil they owned, had paid its dues by performing knightly service in battle.

Nor was the consciousness of gentle blood the only one that caused Charles Marshdale to writhe with a proud feeling of value unfairly estimated, when he saw himself treated as something that ranked but little above his father's ploughman, and that by squires and squiresses to whom he felt an intellectual superiority which might have made him shrink from any intimate intercourse with them, had it been offered, as much as he now shrank from their scorn. And then, poor youth, as if to complete the sum of his hoarded discontents, he fell desperately in love with Harriet Hartwell!

And why had he never said that he loved her? Why, even when he had read in her innocent young eyes the tenderness with which he had so bitterly reproached her on the day before her marriage,—why had he, with such desperate strength of resolution, persisted in hiding from her the passionate tenderness, the almost adoring admiration with which his heart was filled? Because the stern pride of his nature made him shrink, like a coward, from the misery which he knew he should feel if either the father, mother, or sister of his idol met the avowal of his love with a word, or even with a look, that might be construed into a doubt of his being a suitable match for her in point of station.

Common sense did not, at that time, make a sufficiently active portion of his character to suggest to him any doubts as to their not having money enough to live upon; and had it been otherwise, had he been quite aware of the very rational objections on that score which the Hartwell family might have made to an alliance with him, he would have met the misfortune with much more philosophy than any with which he could endure the idea that he was considered as belonging to a class beneath the rank of gentleman.

The ignorant injustice of this galled him to the quick, and produced a deeper degree of suffering than would have been natural, or in any way excusable in a man possessed of a more sober judgment, or less gifted, or afflicted (whichever it may be called), with that perilous faculty of imagination, which, while it gives poetic fervour, and exaltation of thought and feeling, gives also the terrible susceptibility which often makes the mind an instrument of torture.

It may easily be perceived that this was not a character to find consolation from confiding its indignant sorrow to a light-

spirited, gay-hearted young brother like Godfrey, or to a cool-headed, reasonable elder sister like Susan ; and thus it happened that neither the one nor the other knew any more what was going on within his heart or his head, than he did of Godfrey's speculations upon the judicious succession of crops, or Susan's contrivances for the convenient multiplication of her poultry.

But, notwithstanding this, he was fondly beloved by them both ; and to his father he was especially endeared by his striking resemblance to the beautiful wife he had lost so early. Moreover, Farmer Marshdale, though he felt that he did not quite understand his son Charles, had a great notion that " he had a good deal in him ; " but whether this unknown quantity of unknown power was likely to make him a rich bishop, or only a poor philosopher, he had certainly, as yet, no very satisfactory means of judging.

The very natural wish, so strongly urged by Godfrey, that his brother should not only be present at his marriage, but perform the ceremony, the parson of the parish being, in every sense, the father of the bride, had been complied with, at last, by Charles, but much more reluctantly than any of his family suspected, or they certainly would not have urged him to compliance with their wishes.

Perhaps poor Charles, among many other miserable thoughts, might have become awakened to the disagreeable fact that his humble-minded brother had found means to conquer difficulties which he had deemed insurmountable.

Whatever the cause of his melancholy, melancholy he certainly was, and happy was it for the cheerful trio, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell and Farmer Marshdale, that the young student withdrew himself from the Vicarage wedding-dinner almost as soon as the cloth was removed, leaving them to weave plans for the future, in which were blended some of the very brightest and loveliest colours that hope and fond affection could furnish. But to the melancholy Charles such conversation would have been anything but agreeable. Little recked he of their hopes so fair ; he was really and truly wretched from more causes than one, and he showed as much consideration for them as for himself, when he left the gay trio to their strawberries and wine, and retreated to the now forsaken bench that had been the scene of his last interview with Harriet Hartwell.

It boots not to tell how he passed the two or three miserable hours which followed ; but they were sufficiently miserable to make him ardently wish they might be the last he should spend in a neighbourhood which recalled such torturing recollections, till time and reason had enabled him to meet them with less intensity of suffering.

Yet, notwithstanding this ardent wish, day after day elapsed, and found him still lingering at Five Elms, although he had previously named many important reasons which made his coming there at that time extremely inconvenient to him, and although the ceremony for which he had finally consented to waive all objections had been performed nearly a week, and every shadow of reason for his longer absenting himself from his usual avocations had vanished.

His good father was greatly puzzled to guess why it was that he continued to waste so many hours in apparently very tedious idleness, when he had lately made it so very evident that he had much to do elsewhere ; but yet he could not make up his mind to ask the dear boy why he stayed so long, though it was quite impossible to look in his melancholy face and fancy that he found pleasure in remaining.

Neither could the kind-hearted vicar give words to the same uncivil question ; though, if possible, he had more cause to be puzzled at it than his neighbour ; for, day after day, with most perplexing punctuality, did the mysterious young man pay Mr. Hartwell an uninvited, and apparently most intentless, visit, in his little study, and after passing a very long half-hour, either in silence or in the most unmeaning talk imaginable, take himself away again without leaving on the mind of the good vicar the slightest idea for what reason he had come.

The excursion of the newly-married pair was to be completed punctually on the eighth day ; for Godfrey could not conveniently be longer absent from the farm ; and on the morning of the seventh, Charles Marshdale appeared as usual in Mr. Hartwell's study, where, as usual, he remained for half an hour, during which their general deficiency in conversation was, in some degree, supplied by the young man's very particular inquiries as to the certainty and the exactness of the newly-married couple's return. To which the vicar replied by stating very precisely, that they would most certainly arrive in time for a four-o'clock dinner. On receiving this answer, Charles Marshdale suddenly rose, and, with a heightened colour, said—"I shall not, then, be able to welcome them on their return, for I must positively be on my way to London before mid-day to-morrow ; but I will beg you, sir, to assure them of my most ardent wishes for their happiness." And as he said this, a tear stood in his eye, and the intonation of his voice showed an earnestness of feeling that could not be misunderstood.

The vicar, who had begun to think that the young man, notwithstanding his acknowledged talents, was a very queer and unmeaning sort of personage, was touched by this unex-

pected demonstration of feeling, and, thinking that he had judged him harshly, stretched out his hand cordially and affectionately to bid him farewell; but though the tear had not passed away, and though his hand was received, and wrung in a manner that denoted strong emotion, Mr. Hartwell could not without difficulty restrain a smile when the strange young man added, "If I call upon you to-morrow morning at ten, shall I be sure to see you, sir?"

The idea that at the very moment of departure he should deem it necessary to make him another of these strange, purposeless visits, had something exceedingly ridiculous in it; nevertheless, the kind-hearted vicar did not laugh, or even smile, as he replied, "Yes, Charles, you will be sure to find me."

It will be easily believed that this week had not been an idle one to Mrs. Hartwell and her two faithful handmaidens; but never was any labour of love performed more zealously than that of preparing the Vicarage for the residence of Mary, in the character of a married woman; and, with much thoughtful and delicate attention to the perfect independence of the young couple, everything was completed in excellently good time, and in a manner to leave little danger that they should either of them feel very painfully impatient for the completion of the mansion which was to be their future home.

But, notwithstanding her having all this business upon her hands, (and it really was no trifling matter, for some of the new arrangements had converted a bed-room into a very pretty sitting-room, and a young lady's bed-chamber into a young man's receptacle for guns, fishing-nets, boots, books, and all manner of small masculine accommodations,) but, despite all this, Mrs. Hartwell found time, before the bridal party had been gone many hours, to write to the ever-dear Harriet an account of the interesting event, including all particulars of the ceremony, from the important circumstance of Mrs. Montagu's having honoured it with her presence, down to the names of the little village girls who had strewed their path with flowers.

The fond mother had been, and still was, heavy at heart on account of Mrs. Cuthbert's long silence; but though greatly at a loss how to account for it, she did not,—for she could not bear the thought of it for a moment,—attribute it to any falling-off in affection. Her letter, therefore, contained not a single word of reproach; but was filled to the very edges with all those precious little details which true affection so loves to give and receive.

Had Mrs. Hartwell, instead of yielding entirely to her own feelings in this, been studying only to awaken those of Harriet,

she could not have succeeded better. Had she filled her letter with reproaches, the effect would have been very different; for poor Harriet would have had the feeling that they were not deserved, inasmuch as her silence had been occasioned solely by the fear of giving her family pain by confessing that she had not yet found courage to announce to her proud husband the distasteful news of Mary's approaching marriage with the son of Farmer Marshdale. But as, instead of reproach, the letter addressed her in precisely the same tone and manner that her ever-dear mother would have used in former happy days, if recounting the same event and describing the same dear familiar scenes, the heart of Harriet melted within her as she read it. Her very soul seemed to be back again at Penmorris: every idea of fear at her husband's anger seemed suddenly to vanish, and she not only determined to announce to him her sister's marriage, when they met at dinner, which was the first moment at which she could expect to see him, but she determined also to state very explicitly that she flattered herself no obstacle would arise to prevent her having the much-wished-for happiness of paying a visit to her family as soon as the London season was over.

Nor did her resolution falter when the moment arrived for putting it in execution. Perhaps, Mrs. Cuthbert was not quite so timid, and not quite so shy, as she had been before the notice of the Prince Regent had made the great majority of the set amiable: which she lived, treat her as a person of consequence. Be this as it may, her voice had no tremor in it when she said, as soon as they were left tête-à-tête over their dessert—"I have some news for you, Mr. Cuthbert. I have received a letter from my mother to-day, announcing the marriage of my sister."

The visage of Mr. Cuthbert immediately puckered itself into innumerable cross-looking wrinkles; not that he in the least anticipated anything more disagreeable from the intelligence, than that it must have the effect of recalling persons and places which it would be more agreeable to forget. However, he had no intention whatever to be uncivil to a lady so greatly esteemed in the very highest quarter as Mrs. Cuthbert, and therefore, after the struggle of a moment, he replied, "I hope the connection is one calculated to give satisfaction to her family."

"Oh, yes," replied his lady, very gaily, though with a slight augmentation of colour—"it is, indeed! She is married to Mr. Godfrey Marshdale, the eldest son of a family that we have known and respected for many years."

"Mr. Godfrey—what?" returned Mr. Cuthbert, in a sort of

grim whisper, which, nevertheless, admitted of a very strong emphasis.

"Marshdale," repeated his wife, very courageously.

"You do not mean to tell me, madam," returned the aged husband, addressing her for the first time by this most formal of matrimonial epithets—"I trust you do not mean to tell me that your sister, the sister of the lady whom I have made my wife, has married herself to a labouring farmer?"

"Godfrey Marshdale is not a labouring farmer, sir," replied Mrs. Cuthbert, with more of anger than fear, in the colour that dyed her cheeks. "He is the son of the long-descended possessor of the land on which he was born."

The only part of this remonstrance which reached the comprehension of Mr. Cuthbert, was its tone of fearless independence, and his understanding seemed almost shaken by the mingled rage and astonishment which it inspired; he half rose from his chair, as if he were about to fly at her, and box her ears; but immediately reseating himself, he said, in a threatening tone, but which excited at that moment more dislike than terror, "Listen to me, madam, and mark every word I utter, or by the heaven above us, you shall learn to know that the same man who can pass whole months in demonstrating the tenderest love and indulgence towards a wife who conducts herself properly, and in a way to do him honour, may show himself precisely the reverse of this, if the ungrateful object of his tenderness dares to dishonour and disgrace him. You have seen what is my mode of living here, and who are my associates. This day, this very day, I have been informed, on the very best authority, that it is the purpose of the Regent to confer a peerage on me, and I leave you to guess, madam, what my feelings are likely to be, if I am ever again outraged by hearing my wife—a future peeress—allude to such connexions as those you have now so rashly mentioned. I command you, therefore, never by a single word, direct or indirect, to allude to any of the persons residing at Penmorris. On this condition, I am willing to forget the hateful disgrace you have announced to me; but if you transgress this absolutely needful regulation, I give you fair notice, that I will appoint a residence and a mode of life for you which will put it out of your power to injure me, either in the eyes of my sovereign, or in those of the noble personages who are my friends and associates."

Poor Harriet turned very pale as she listened to this brutal speech; and it can hardly be doubted that something like fear of the stern-looking old man before her was blended with all the other feelings that were struggling at her heart; nevertheless, it was far from being the strongest of them. Both contempt

and dislike were stronger, as was clearly proved by her almost immediately replying :

"Do you mean to threaten me, sir, with being sent back to my father's house ? If so, there is no occasion for any further discussion between us, for I am perfectly ready to go."

"And you are ready also," he returned, while his nether lip trembled with rage—"you are ready also to transplant my name, and the title that so soon is to belong to it, to the dung-hill where you may sit beside your sister, while you congratulate her upon being the young farmer's wife ? You, madam, may be ready for any species of disgrace ; your words and manner seem to make it possible. But the case is different with me ; I have given you my name, and it has become my duty to watch over you in such a manner as shall prevent your disgracing it. But I say this without either wish or intention of treating you with the slightest degree of severity. Should you be so unhappily unadvised as to make me feel that there is danger of your compromising the dignity of a name that has been ever honourable, and is now about to be ennobled by the sovereign ; should you be mad enough to make me fear this, I should immediately convey you to Corwyn Castle, the remote situation of which will make it easy for me to prevent your doing this fatal injury either to yourself or me."

Harriet made no reply. At that moment, all that she thought of, or wished for, was to be alone. She seemed to feel that she had arrived at the crisis of her destiny, and that all the good or evil of her future years might depend upon the line of conduct she should now adopt. She saw before her a tyrant, a most hateful tyrant, who threatened her with imprisonment for no other fault than daring to speak of her own honoured and beloved family. A sense of injustice—that deepest and strongest provocative to resentment—swelled her heart to a degree that made breathing painful ; but she did not forget—even at that moment she did not forget—that she was the wife of the man who thus threatened her, and that she was by so her own self-will and deliberate choice. "Oh ! I must think long and deeply before I decide !" she murmured, inwardly. "Can I give them up ? Can I, indeed, give them up for ever ? Or must I present myself before them as a runaway wife, who, having first obstinately persisted in bestowing herself upon a rich old man, that she might enjoy the pleasure of being a fine lady, comes back to them poor and disgraced as soon as she discovers that she does not like him ?"

She felt sick with terror at the picture she had thus conjured up ; and rising quickly, lest in another moment she might lose the power of rising at all, she said, though not very distinctly, "It will be better for me to be alone for a few minutes." And,

without waiting for an answer, tottered to the door, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHE was about to seat herself in the hall, that she might overcome the feeling of faintness which had frightened her, and which made her fear that she might be unable to mount the many stairs which led to the quiet dressing-room where she so greatly wished to be; but a servant was passing across, which made it impossible she could do so unobserved, and she therefore roused herself and began to ascend.

The fresh air and her good-will together, enabled her to get the better of this faintness, and she reached her retreat in safety—a piece of good luck much greater than she was aware of; for had she paused in the hall, as she wished to do, her very desperately angry husband would have been beside her in the next moment, in order to lead her back to the dining-room for the purpose of relieving the fulness of his heart by uttering to her a little more brutality on the subject of her sister's marriage, and a few more threats concerning the power he intended to exercise over her fair self.

In fact, he was at that moment in a state which rendered him more than usually incapable of yielding to reason; for he had, in good truth, been told, and that, too, by one who would not have ventured to say it without authority, that the Regent had actually been heard to declare, the day after the ball at which he had been so pleasantly amused, that he thought he should reward old Cuthbert for marrying such a pretty wife, and giving such a pretty ball, by making him a peer.

This news had, in good earnest, very nearly turned the head of the vain old man; and he was in a state of such ardent self-esteem at the moment poor Harriet communicated her news, that he really began to doubt whether his own personal merits, displayed as they had now been before the eyes of the Regent, might not suffice to obtain all he wanted, even without the assistance of his beautiful young wife.

While this humour lasted, he was likely enough to say, and to threaten—upon a subject so wounding to his feelings as the suddenly finding himself brother-in-law to a young farmer—more than he might have himself thought wise in cooler moments; and, had she listened to him then, it is possible that an immediate and very violent separation would have ensued.

For Harriet, too, was not so much in possession of her calm reason at that moment as it was certainly desirable she should be before she decided upon leaving the husband she had chosen. But, notwithstanding all the folly which that unfortunate choice had displayed, poor Harriet was as pure-hearted a young creature as ever lived, and would greatly have preferred laying her beautiful head in an early grave, to committing any act which could be justly considered as disgraceful to herself, to her beloved family, or even to her little-esteemed old husband himself.

The solitary meditations of both husband and wife, therefore, tended to mutual pacification.

Mr. Cuthbert bethought himself of the killing disappointment he should have to endure if, after actually shutting up his wife in his Welsh castle, he should discover that the Regent's new-born partiality to himself was not altogether independent of his royal meditations upon the Pearl of his Duchy, and Anne Boleyn; and Mrs. Cuthbert, on her side, bethought herself that her excellent father would blush at seeing his daughter, in the character of a discarded wife, take her place among his irreproachable family in the Vicarage pew; that her mother would hang her honoured head, and weep; and that her dear Mary, for whose sake she had felt ready to clope from her husband, would blush as she saw her present herself to her own new family under such circumstances.

So, after a hearty flood of tears, and then a copious bathing of her eyes in cold water, poor Harriet rang her bell for Selby, made such alteration in her dress as was necessary for the opera, and then descended to the little drawing-room, where tea was always served before they went out for the evening.

She half started, but was certainly rather glad than sorry, to see that Mr. Cuthbert was already there, and took her place at the tea-table, looking perfectly self-possessed and almost perfectly good-humoured.

Her half-frightened husband stole a glance at her; and very greatly comforted was he to perceive not only that she was dressed for the opera, but also that her fair face had recovered, in a great degree, the beautiful serenity upon which he had no doubt his venerated Sovereign would condescend to gaze, as soon as he conveniently could after settling himself in his box.

Thus comforted in mind, and cheered in spirit, he approached the tea-table and his lady, seated himself at right angles to her, and then politely said, "Your head-dress is perfect to-night, my dearest love! And I rejoice to see that my having expressed my feelings so strongly to you on the subject of your sister's unfortunate marriage has not been permitted to throw

a cloud upon your charming brow. Your manner of receiving, my opinion does you honour, my sweet Harriet; and, as a proof that I know how to appreciate it, I now beg to assure you that I shall never again recur to the painful subject; and I feel sure that it will be unnecessary for me to beg that you will avoid it also. If a sense of filial duty induces you to write to your parents, do so, my sweet love; but never let us make any allusion to Penmorris again."

It required all the resolution with which poor Harriet had determined to endure the hateful chain she had shackled herself withal in order to avoid replying to this speech with the indignation it inspired; but the picture her fancy had drawn of the effect which her separation from her husband would produce on the happiness of the beloved group he thus outraged, was still too vividly impressed upon her mind to permit any warmth of feeling to efface it. Let her suffer what she might, she was determined that it should not be her fault if they were made to suffer with her; and her only reply to her husband was a somewhat stiff, and somewhat low bow over the tea-cup she was raising to her lips.

With this, Mr. Cuthbert, it seemed, thought it best to be satisfied, for he pushed the subject no farther; and both of them, at the same moment as it were, imbibed that often-useful matrimonial lesson which teaches, that where two married people do not perfectly agree on any particular point, it is better for each of them to pursue, as nearly as they can, the line of conduct they think best respecting it, without hazarding the peace of their lives by talking about it.

So Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert went to the opera together that night without evincing by look, word, or manner to each other, or to anybody else, that they were not in all respects most perfectly well satisfied with their condition as man and wife.

But, nevertheless, there was a good deal changed in the actual situation of both.

Hitherto, Mrs. Cuthbert, though feeling very certain that her husband's pride would be wounded by hearing of her sister's connection with a person whom she knew he had heard spoken of as "young Farmer Marshdale," had never seen any reason to suppose, nor had she any right to presume, that he would express himself on the subject with the indecent violence he had used towards her that day; nor was there any other point of his conduct (as far as she understood it, poor thing!) which could so far justify the dislike she was conscious of towards him as to prevent her reproaching herself for it, and constantly feeling that, in order to atone for this, it was more than ever her duty to please, and oblige him in all ways.

To this feeling was unquestionably owing the almost servile

obedience with which she had hitherto complied with all his instructions as to the manner of receiving the gallant attentions of the Regent ; for, although a most genuine, pure, and innocent sentiment of loyalty to the son and heir of "George the Third" did in truth mix itself with all her feelings towards him, this, alone and unaided by a very dutiful wish to please her husband also, would hardly have enabled her to sustain, so perseveringly as she had done, the immense proportion of royal tediousness which had been bestowed upon her.

But now, she was, for the first time, deeply conscious of having been ill-treated by her husband, and the change which this produced in her heart, her conscience, and her judgment, was great indeed.

No violence of temper mixed with this—violence of temper was a defect from which Mrs. Cuthbert was constitutionally free. But, notwithstanding the lamentable blunder she had committed in making such a marriage, it had been a blunder only. It was, moreover, honestly committed, in the fanciful persuasion that she really did, and always should, like and love a man so perfectly elegant and gentlemanlike as Mr. Cuthbert, a great deal better than she could ever like and love any other man, who might be less remarkable for those advantages.

She therefore married conscientiously ; and her chief unhappiness since, had arisen from the conscientious conviction that she had blundered, in defiance of the openly-expressed opinions of her parents, and of that most dear and gentle counsellor, her sister.

Conscientious, too, were the misgivings which tormented her, lest her hourly-increasing dislike of the childish fondness and silly vanity of her aged husband might betray her into any relaxation of the duty and gratitude which she owed to a man who had raised her, by his generous affection, to the distinguished place she now held in society.

There was something very beautiful, yet very pitiable, in the blind compliance which this fear of not behaving well enough to her husband led to. If, instead of urging her to pay the most unremitting attention to every word the Prince Regent spoke to her, and to testify the most eager desire to comply with every intimation of his wishes, Mr. Cuthbert had, with equal pertinacity, required of her that she should return his salutation by dropping on her knees and kissing his hands, she would most unquestionably have done it ; and it is a positive fact, that the more all this enforced devotion to his Royal Highness wearied her, the greater satisfaction she had in reflecting upon it, when—

"Summing the actions of the day
Each night before she slept."

Nay, she often secretly reproached herself for the unconquerable repugnance which she felt to asking him for her husband's appointment as one of his equeries. She feared that this repugnance might be more disobedient than reasonable; but somehow or other, it was invincible. Though positively as innocent as the babe born yesterday of every thought approaching suspicion that the Prince Regent dreamed of anything like love-making in all his attention and fine speeches to her, she nevertheless felt that all the answering attention she had been enjoined to pay him would assume in his eyes the appearance of something very like coaxing, should it be followed by asking a favour.

But neither these self-reproaches for having done less than was required of her, nor the blind obedience which had already led her to do so much, were likely to continue quite unchanged after the scene in the dining-parlour this day.

All feeling of being under obligation to Mr. Cuthbert had disappeared from her mind, as if by magic. He had threatened her—harshly, cruelly threatened her—and that not for any fault, but solely because he suspected her of feeling affection for her parents and her sister.

Harriet was very profoundly ignorant, as far as any knowledge of the mysteries of fashion was concerned; but her intellect was clear enough in the simpler matters of moral right and wrong.

Many of the elegant and enlightened new acquaintance to whom her marriage had introduced her, would doubtless have been greatly inclined not only to call, but to think, her an idiot, could they have been made aware of the total absence of any shadow of suspicion in her mind that the Royal old gentleman, who had during the last three months invited her to sit so often by his side, was making love to her. But so it was. All that she knew, or fancied she knew, about the matter was, that her husband, being a very loyal, a very proud, and a somewhat ambitious man, had very vehemently wished, and very strongly insisted upon, her devoting herself wholly, upon these occasions, to the task of listening to, and, to the best of her power, conversing with, this distinguished personage; and she truly believed herself to have been performing a conjugal act of duty thereby.

She knew, also, that she had been uniformly kind and affectionate in her demeanour to her husband, and that she had never in any single instance permitted the miserable feelings of distaste, disappointment, and 'ennui' to affect her behaviour towards him.

Such being the state of her conscience, it was natural enough that she should resent, as ingratitude, injustice, and cruelty,

the insulting language he had been using towards her, and she now felt that, in deliberately resolving to endure the misery of remaining with him as long as they both should live, she was acting more from a sense of duty towards her own family than towards him. Not, indeed, that she would have deemed herself justified in transgressing any of the recognised duties of a wife towards him, but she no longer felt that he had any reasonable claim either upon her affection or her gratitude.

Nor had this first matrimonial quarrel failed to produce a very considerable effect upon the husband likewise. He, too, knew that he had been violent, rude, and tyrannical; and his nature, by no means an uncommon one, led him to feel something very like incipient dislike towards the young creature he had injured and outraged. This feeling, however, was not likely, as yet, to annoy her overtly in any way; for, in the first place, he still felt that he had not yet obtained all that he hoped to do, from her influence; and, moreover, there had been a quiet little something in her manner, both when she left the dining-room, and when she received his condescending apology over the tea-table, which he might have found it very difficult to define, but which made him suspect that his young wife might not be quite such a nonentity as he had supposed her to be. This, however, produced no worse effect than the awakening a sort of caution, which made him confess to himself that he must take a little care how he managed her.

In short, old Mr. Cuthbert and his beautiful young wife entered their box at the opera that night a very different couple, in reference to each other, to what they had been the last time they appeared there.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Mrs. CUTHBERT had been repeatedly told by her tutor-husband that she must never fail to watch for the moment when the Regent made his appearance, and that the moment she was fortunate enough to meet his eye, she must salute him with deep respect, but with a smiling countenance, and never remove her eyes from his box, till he had ceased to direct his glass to hers.

And so faithfully and constantly had she obeyed these orders, that not a single frequenter of the opera had failed to remark, and comment upon, the undisguised eagerness with which she sought his notice.

But, on the present occasion, she for the first time neglected

these standing instructions, and the Royal 'lorgnette' was raised, and directed towards her, in vain. It must not be supposed, however, that this sudden disobedience arose from a vexed temper, that took the earliest opportunity of showing resentment for an offence received—it was, on the contrary, the deliberate result of reflection.

A sort of instinctive delicacy had often made the task of courting the Regent's attention, which had been so rigorously imposed upon her, exceedingly disagreeable; and had the Prince been a young instead of an old man, it is more than probable that all these stringent orders would have been issued in vain. Hitherto, however, she had obeyed them with the docility of an obedient child, commanded to be particularly attentive to its grandfather. But now she remembered that the diseased pride of her husband had led him, in the most imperious manner, to forbid her ever mentioning the name of any individual of her family again. It required neither more years nor more wisdom than she already possessed, to make her judgment, as well as her heart, revolt against a man who could utter such words to his wife respecting such a father, such a mother, and such a sister; and in this revolt a little reflection made her, naturally enough, include some very strong doubts as to the propriety of letting this same inflated pride dictate her line of conduct towards the Sovereign, from whom it panted to receive new honours.

"I will submit to it no more!" was the conclusion to which her meditations brought her. "I have made myself his wife, and it is my duty to remain with him, and to endure, as patiently as I can, all the misery inevitably consequent upon so mad an act. But it is not my duty to abstain from pronouncing the honoured name of my parents; nor can it be my duty either to pauper the contemptible vanity of my husband, by continuing to wait, with the patient docility of a slave, upon every look and every word of the Prince from whom he is so absurdly seeking preferment. I will not do it."

This very rational resolution was immediately acted upon, but, had it been taken and acted upon before, its effect would have prevented more mischief, and incurred less danger.

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There could not be a greater proof of the faithful obedience hitherto shown by Mrs. Cuthbert to the above-mentioned standing law promulgated by her husband relative to her conduct at the opera, than the fact that the resolution she had now taken to obey this command no longer, gave her a feeling of liberty that was as pleasant as it was new to her. Not only did she experience very great delight from feeling that she might now, without restraint, give her unbroken attention to

the stage, but when the curtain was down, she found a vast deal more amusement than she had ever done before, from looking about the beautiful theatre in all directions, without fancying that she was committing a fault, by not devoting all her attention to one.

While thus engaged, during the long interval employed in preparing the stage for the ballet, her eye accidentally rested upon the figure of a tall young man in a box nearly opposite to her, whose eyes seemed very earnestly fixed upon her box, though a noble gentleman, whom she well knew by sight, appeared to be doing his very best to engage him in conversation.

Mrs. Cuthbert was not at all near-sighted, but at the beautiful but too large Opera House in the Haymarket, a good glass is a very necessary aid when we wish to reconnoitre and recognise features. Harriet did now wish this, and she accordingly raised a very excellent glass to her eye, which enabled her to ascertain, almost beyond a doubt, that the person who was still evidently looking at her was no other than Charles Marshdale.

It was certainly a matter of surprise to see her rustic neighbour thus familiarly associated with a nobleman of high rank—so much so, indeed, as to make her almost doubt his identity, yet, nevertheless, a second and more steady glance convinced her that it was indeed her new brother-in-law's brother that she was looking at, and no other.

At the moment she made this discovery, she was alone in her box, Mr. Cuthbert being engaged in making sundry visits to sundry personages, in whose presence it was his glory to be seen. Moreover, this leaving his box was his constant habit, for another reason; he did not wish that it should be supposed in the highest quarter that he was a too watchful or too attentive husband.

Had no such scene passed as that which I have related between the husband and wife at the dinner-table, it is possible that Mrs. Cuthbert's recollections of her last interview with Charles Marshdale would have prevented her feeling any inclination to seek another. But the sight of him now recalled the idea of Godfrey and his wife much more vividly than that of his boyish fancy for herself; and, moreover, the very righteous spirit of opposition that was working within her made her most eagerly desirous to greet, as a brother, the long-known neighbour and friend, who now stood in that near relation to her dear, dear Mary.

She looked eagerly right and left, to see if she could recognise any one with whom she was sufficiently well acquainted, to take the liberty of dismissing him upon an errand across the house; and in the next moment, as if her wishes had made

themselves known by her eyes, the door of her box was opened and a young man, with whose mother and sisters she had become very intimate, walked in to pay his compliments and deliver a message from his party.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Melville!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had returned his salutation; "for I was just wishing to find some kind friend who would execute a mission for me to the other side of the house."

"If you will let me be that friend, I shall feel myself supremely honoured," he replied.

"How very kind you are! Will you, then, go round for me to Lord Perring's box, and tell that tall young man who is talking to him, that I shall be very much obliged if he will come here to speak to me?" said she.

"You know him, then, already—do you?" replied Mr. Melville, apparently much delighted by the commission.

"Oh, yes! to be sure I do; it is Mr. Charles Marshdale," said Mrs. Cuthbert, looking a little surprised at his manner of asking her the question, which seemed to insinuate that she was very clever for having found him out.

"I have known as much for the last four days," returned Mr. Melville; "but he has been recognised by very few as yet, I assure you. I will do your bidding, Mrs. Cuthbert, as fealty as Puck himself," added the young man, as he left the box, "and as, I hope, successfully."

Mrs. Cuthbert was completely at a loss to guess what her messenger meant, and she felt half afraid that he would make some blunder, and bring some unknown personage to her, instead of her old friend. Her fears on this head, however, were speedily dispelled, for in as short a time as it was well possible to reach the opposite box, she saw Mr. Melville appear in it, and address himself, with a very low and respectful bow, to Farmer Marshdale's youngest son.

But Farmer Marshdale's youngest son did not by any means seem inclined to show himself obedient to command; for, instead of preparing himself to accompany her messenger back to her, he stood for a minute or two, with an aspect which, as she contemplated it through her glass, seemed very particularly immovable, and then very deliberately seated himself in the best front corner of Lord Perring's box.

Could this, indeed, be Charles Marshdale? She would by this time have felt pretty certain that it was not, had she not remembered that Mr. Melville had declared that he, too, knew that this puzzling individual bore that hitherto unassuming name.

She waited for his return with some impatience, though he did not wait long.

"I am sorry to come back to you alone," said her unsuccessful messenger, again presenting himself ; "but this renowned Mr. Marshdale, or Marinaduke, or whatever his real name may be, declares that the lady who sent me must have made some mistake, for that he has not the honour of being acquainted with her."

"Nonsense !" said Mrs. Cuthbert, half laughing and half frowning, and, moreover, with a slight augmentation of colour, from supposing that the young man still thought proper to resent the plain-speaking with which she had chid his boyish presumption at their last meeting.

But after a moment's reflection, during which she decided in her own mind that the best way to remove all such foolish recollections from his mind would be by treating him at once with all the freedom of a near connection, she drew a golden pencil-case from her pocket, and wrote upon a blank leaf torn from her libretto—"If the brother of my brother refuses to come to me, I really think I must go to him ;" and then twisting it into the sacred knot (sacred from all but a page), she gave it to the astonished Mr. Melville, and begging a hundred thousand pardons for the trouble she was giving, besought him, with her very sweetest smile, to "take that little note to Mr. Charles Marshdale, for her !"

Of course, he could do no less than smile too, and declare himself only too happy to do her bidding. And he did do it, if possible, with a lighter foot, and still more of curiosity and interest than before.

Mrs. Cuthbert, too, felt a good deal of interest in the result of his commission, but it was of a very different quality from what it would have been had she known a little more about the old acquaintance to whom her impromptu dispatch was addressed. She would have been greatly astonished had she been told, what, however, was unquestionably the fact, that, notwithstanding their life-long acquaintance, she really knew very little about him. There certainly had been a fleeting moment or two, when, if the melancholy forebodings of his proud and wounded spirit had not choked the avowal of his love, the young Harriet might have listened to it in a way that would have greatly altered the destiny of both ; but as he had managed it, she never gave him credit for the hundred thousandth part of the attachment he had really felt for her, and was much more disposed to suspect him of having been a very thoughtless and boyish trifier in such matters than to attribute to him any of the high wrought feelings which had made him what he really was.

At the present moment, when her heart was brim full of family affection, and her conscience seeking relief from some

tormenting doubts as to what degree of tyranny a wedded wife ought to endure without rebelling, despite the soothing conviction that she could not love her own faultless sister too well, the idea of recalling any of her former little flirtations with Charles would have seemed quite preposterous had it suggested itself. But no such thoughts entered her head. She knew that she was now (unhappily) placed so far above them all, in the estimation of the world, that any omission on her part, anything like shrinking from the familiar habits of former intimacy, might be construed by Charles Marshdale into pride and haughtiness, and rather than give him cause to conceive this idea, she would have run the risk of puzzling all the young men of her acquaintance as much as she now puzzled the obedient Mr. Melville.

Mrs. Cuthbert had become sufficiently accustomed to the unscrupulous style in which people take the liberty of looking at each other across a theatre to permit her again applying her glass to her eye when her messenger re-entered Lord Perring's box ; and she perceived that, upon the delivery of her note into the hand of young Marshdale, he rose from his seat with what seemed to her a hurried and almost frightened movement, and immediately left the box.

Harriet smiled, not only at her evident success, but at the manner of it. "I should not at all wonder," thought she, "if the poor dear boy took my threat quite literally, and was frightened out of his wits lest I should walk round the house and present myself in Lord Perring's box, in order to learn the latest news from Cornwall. I believe that country-bred book-worms like Charles give fine ladies credit for doing anything and everything they please."

Ere her soliloquy had lasted much longer, the curtain before her door was again pushed aside, and the two young men stood before her.

Her first movement was cordially to stretch out her hand to young Marshdale, and to exclaim, "How do you do, my dear Charles ? I am delighted to see you !"

But instead of taking her hand, the young man bowed his head upon his breast so profoundly as to make it doubtful if he perceived this offered hand, which was still at some distance from him.

"If you have no further commands for me, Mrs. Cuthbert," said young Melville, "I will say good night, for my mother will think I have forsaken her."

Mrs. Cuthbert repeated her thanks for his kind services, and then Harriet and her lifelong old acquaintance were left alone.

Young Marshdale stood with his hands upon the back of a chair, and his eyes, as it seemed, fixed upon the seat of it ; nor

had he yet lifted them to the face of his *ci-devant* love. This extreme timidity on his part embarrassed her a little, but vexed her more. There was nothing in the world she was so anxious for at that moment as to prove to him that, notwithstanding her diamonds and her opera-box, she was the same Harriet Hartwell who had been his playfellow for nearly a score of years; who had gone a nutting and a blackberry-picking with him a thousand times, and who had quarrelled with him and made it up again a thousand and one.

But how was she to achieve this? He would not shake hands with her; he would not even look at her! Then what could she do to convince him that she was not the proud fine lady before whom she fancied that he trembled, but his faithful and affectionate old friend, and what was more—oh! much more still—the only sister of his only brother's wife?

She endeavoured to look into his face, and her own bore a smile so kind and friendly, that, had she succeeded, the ice in which he seemed to have enveloped himself might perchance have been thawed; but the attitude of the young man made this quite impossible.

There was a pause, which, despite all the simple, genuine kindness of her feelings and intentions, was beginning to grow awkward. But Mrs. Cuthbert had too much good sense and too much good feeling to endure this, and she said, half kindly, half reproachfully, "Pray, pray, Charles Marshdale, do sit down with me for a few minutes. Cannot you imagine how very anxious I must be to hear something of dear Godfrey and his darling wife? My mother tells me that you were present at the wedding, Charles! Oh! what would I not have given to have been there too!"

There was something in these words, or in the voice which spoke them, which so far relaxed the seemingly stern reserve of the young man that he complied with her request that he would sit down with her, and he did so on the seat immediately opposite to her own.

And then, for one short moment, he fixed his eyes upon her, while hers were as fixedly directed towards him.

This mutual examination seemed to produce a strong effect on both. Never, perhaps, had Mrs. Cuthbert looked more splendidly beautiful. She was highly dressed, as it was her husband's pleasure and express command she always should be when appearing at the opera; and on this occasion she wore a profusion of diamonds, most tastefully arranged amidst her beautiful hair.

Any one who had seen and understood the look that young Marshdale fixed upon her would have said that he winced—nay, that he almost shuddered as he contemplated Harriet

Hartwell metamorphosed into this dazzling epitome of elegance and fashion ; while, on her side, she started violently, after the gaze of a moment, and exclaimed, " Good Heaven ! "

The young man said nothing, and after the one steadfast, and almost stern look which he had bestowed upon her, he withdrew his eyes, and dropped his long dark eye-lashes over them, so that he almost looked as if he had closed them.

Mrs. Cuthbert, on the contrary, did not remove her eyes from his face, but, continuing to look at him very earnestly, she said, " It is impossible for me not to see, Charles Marshdale, that in some way or other I have offended you. Why you would not come to me this evening when I first sent for you I could not imagine, but now I begin to think I understand it. I am quite sure that you were at our great ball, Charles, but I give you my word of honour that I did not know you. For what reason on earth did you put on that hideous light-coloured wig ? I do not believe that your own sister would have known you, and I have only found it out now because you have put on the same strange sort of angry, melancholy look that you did then. Did you really think I knew you, Charles, that night, and pretended not to do so ? "

" I thought that you did not recognise me on that occasion, Mrs. Cuthbert," replied Charles Marshdale ; " and what you now say of course removes all doubt upon the subject. "

" Then why do you still speak to me as if I were a stranger to you, my dear Charles ? " returned Mrs. Cuthbert, with the most earnest friendliness of manner. " If it were not the success of your own horrid wig which made you angry with me, I am sure I cannot guess what else it could be. We have quarrelled often in days of yore, Charles," she added, after a short pause, and slightly colouring ; " but surely if no other motives led us both to forget and forgive this, the thought of our present near relationship ought to do it. I will promise to be a sister to you, my old friend, if you will be a brother to me ; and there may be moments when it would be a great comfort to me to believe that there was any one who would feel for me, and counsel me, like a brother. "

The eyes of poor Harriet were filled with tears as she said this, and those of Charles, which were suddenly raised to her face, perceived it, and the whole aspect of his countenance changed in a moment.

" Are you unhappy, Mrs. Cuthbert ? Are you suffering ? " he said, in a whisper so hollow and so mournful that it sounded almost like a voice from the tomb—" oh ! if you could but explain, if you could make me understand—what is there that I would not do ? What is there that I would not dare ? "

he added, while something like a groan seemed to burst with irrepressible violence from his breast.

The astonishment of Harriet was so great that, for a moment, it completely deprived her of the power of answering. Never had she, from the hour of her marriage to the present, expressed to mother, sister, waiting-woman, or any other human creature, a single word that could have been interpreted into a confession that she was not happy. How, then, had this obscure young student discovered it? She remembered that, before the departure of her royal guest, she had become woefully weary of his compliments, but it was not possible that this could have expressed itself by such an air of suffering on her countenance as to account for the words she had just listened to.

"I must and I will find out what he means," was the first distinct thought which suggested itself to her; "and if I can but bring him back," thought she, "to the same sort of easy terms that we have all been living upon for so many years—in fact, for all our lives—it will be impossible that he can conceal it from me."

But, in order to do justice to the perfect innocence and purity of mind of the unfortunate Harriet, it will be absolutely necessary to remember that the wild, romantic, devoted, passionate attachment which Charles Marshdale had cherished for her for more years than, considering their ages, would easily be thought possible, was perfectly and altogether unknown to her.

Once or twice, after she had attained the conscious age of seventeen, she had fancied that Charles Marshdale was a little in love with her. But then she saw, and she felt, too, how very differently Godfrey (who very certainly was in love with Mary) behaved to her; and thereupon she speedily convinced herself that Charles was far too much of a boy to know what love meant; and so, after a little ill-concealed contempt and pouting, she altogether abandoned the idea; and while he was breathing out his ardent young soul in elegies to the last happy breeze that had passed over her, and in sonnets to her eyebrows, she was growing more and more convinced that very young men never felt really in love with anybody.

The very unexpected little scene in the shrubbery, on the day preceding her marriage, she considered as a symptom of very impertinent, boyish, and altogether unmeaning jealousy, and it had made but little impression at a moment when every thought was busily occupied on other subjects. And thus it happened that, amidst all her other perils, poor Harriet deliberately set herself to awaken a near and affectionate interest, and to foster a most confidential intimacy, with a man who already loved her with a degree of passionate devotion,

which perhaps none but a poet could feel. To what point of recovered confidence and intimacy this interview might have led them, if it had continued uninterrupted, it is impossible to tell ; for before Mrs. Cuthbert had quite made up her mind as to what she would say next the door of the box was again opened.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE persons who now entered were two gentlemen of considerable distinction, father and son, who were on the visiting list of Mrs. Cuthbert, but by no means intimate with either herself or her husband.

Their appearance rather surprised her, but what presently appeared to be the real cause of it surprised her a great deal more. After inquiries concerning her health, and politely uttering the expression of their hopes that the health of Mr. Cuthbert was perfect also, the elder of the two whispered in her ear, "Will you do us the great favour, dear Mrs. Cuthbert, of introducing us to your friend Mr. Marshdale?"

Harriet's astonishment at this request was extreme, but nevertheless she showed, as she always did on such sort of occasions, that she was an apt scholar in the acquirement of the manners of good society ; for nothing could be more easy, lady-like, and graceful, than the way in which she performed the ceremony requested, although it was secretly accompanied with a degree of puzzled curiosity which was perfectly tormenting.

The extreme beauty of Mrs. Cuthbert, as well as the fashionable celebrity which the marked admiration of the Prince Regent had acquired for her, had produced the effect which may always be observed around the beauty, 'par excellence,' of the season. She always appeared to be, and very often was, the most important person for the time being, whatever scene her presence adorned ; but now, though the scene was her own opera-box, her power seemed suddenly extinguished. Neither the right honourable father, nor the honourable son, paid her any more attention than if she had been a little ugly old dowager of four-score, for the eyes of both the gentlemen were as earnestly fixed upon the countenance of Farmer Marshdale's youngest son as if he had been heir-apparent to an empire.

"I have been long desirous, Mr. Marshdale," said the obsequious peer, "to obtain the honour of an introduction to you, but Perring monopolizes you so tyrannically that nobody else has any chance. May I hope for the pleasure of your company

at dinner on Monday next ? I will promise that you shall meet some of the most distinguished men of the age."

Charles received this speech, and the invitation it contained, with more modesty than shyness, and, having graciously promised to wait upon his lordship on Monday, turned himself with very amiable condescension towards his lordship's son, who stood with an extended hand and eager young eye, ready to propose himself and his friendship to the notice and favour of the obscure young man, with as much zeal as if the fortunes of his whole existence depended upon his overtures being accepted.

Mrs. Cuthbert sat by, with her eyes fixed on the group, and really felt as if some strange delusion had taken possession either of her senses, or of those of the persons before her.

But, before a single word had fallen from either of them which could throw light upon the matter, another person joined the party, who, if possible, added still further to the puzzled Harriet's mystification. The rank of the new-comer was no less than that of one of England's very noblest dukes. He paid his compliments to Mrs. Cuthbert as gracefully as if his visit was intended as an especial compliment to her ; but, this ceremony performed, he turned immediately towards Charles, extending his hand to him with the cordial frankness of an old acquaintance, and said, " Will you forgive me, my dear Marshdale, if I instantly make you my prisoner and carry you off, '*vi et armis*,' to introduce you to my sister ? She says she has been the most unfortunate woman in London, for no less than three times has she been promised that you should be presented to her, and each time some unlucky chance has occurred to prevent it. Mrs. Cuthbert," added his Grace, as he passed his arm under that of his prisoner, " will you forgive me ?"

Harriet bowed mechanically in reply to this appeal, but when she turned her eyes towards Charles, in order, as it were, to give him his congé, there was an expression of such naïve astonishment in them, that the young man, for the first time since he had entered her box, seemed to forget all the solemnity of feeling that appeared to have taken possession of him, and he smiled as he returned her gaze.

Harriet would have found it very difficult to account, even to herself, for the effect which that smile had produced on her ; it was so long since she had last seen the like ! All the interval since her marriage, and several months before it, had elapsed since Charles Marshdale and herself had met together intimately and gaily ; and at that moment this whole period vanished from her memory as if it had never been. She returned the smile ; and had they been alone, there would probably have ensued as much confidence between them as

would have been necessary to explain to her why her old playfellow was "dear Marshdale" to the Duke of ———.

But no such explanation could follow now, nor did the smile upon the young man's altered countenance continue either; he bowed a grave farewell to her and her diamonds, and when the door closed behind him it did not seem to shut out Charles Marshdale, but the most puzzling and mysterious of human beings.

The interview, however, such as it was, assisted in sending her thoughts back to Pennmorris, and to all the dear ones who were dwelling there; and she felt that the hard and heartless barrier which her husband's influence had begun to place between them, was already crumbling. His unjustifiable rage at hearing of the marriage of her sister had begun *this*, and her heart, once released from the pressure of his hitherto unchallenged authority, seemed to fly back to its native and natural home with a warmth of feeling that made her positively forget, for a few happy moments, how sadly distant in every respect she still was from it.

The sight of her husband, who now joined her, was likely enough to bring her back to sober reality and 'triste raison,' but the scene at the dinner-table had awakened a feeling very nearly approaching to a spirit of rebellion within her; and, though something like a shudder passed over her as he entered, his presence seemed to render the thoughts of her home, upon which at that moment she was meditating, only more earnest and more dear.

There are few things in the study of the human mind more remarkable than the immense disproportion of its progress at different epochs, and under different circumstances. Sometimes months, and even years, roll over young heads, without making any very important change perceptible to themselves or to others, either in feelings or character, while at other times, and under the influence of more stirring accidents, latent qualities, and hitherto unconscious energy, will suddenly appear, as if awakened by some mysterious inspiration newly sent; but such power, once awakened, sleeps no more.

Not even the watchful mother of Harriet had ever perceived in her any symptom of the steadfast will and resolute courage which now braced her nerves and dictated her conduct. Some degree of wilfulness indeed might have been read in the manner in which she conquered the opposition of her family to her marriage; but this was but the wilfulness of a petted child, in comparison to the resolute decision as to her future conduct which inspired her now.

Her indignation at the insulting terms in which her family, and particularly her beloved sister, had been mentioned, was as

strong as it was deserved ; but her steadfast determination not to quarrel with her husband in any way that might lead to a separation, was a far greater proof of the newly-awakened energy of character of which I am speaking.

The disgrace which such a separation would be likely to bring upon her already outraged family, was probably the leading idea in her mind, as she resolved against it ; but there was not wanting to strengthen this, such a feeling of self-respect as would prevent any suffering under her wedded thralldom from driving her to seek this desperate cure for it

In short, though she felt that she could never be Mr. Cuthbert's childishly compliant wife again, she did not intend to escape from this by any such clumsy manœuvre as running away from him.

Her head was so full of such thoughts as these, that when her husband entered she had for the moment quite forgotten the puzzling intimacy she had witnessed between her quondam playfellow and the distinguished personages who had shown themselves so eagerly desirous to do him honour ; but she was destined to be infinitely more perplexed on this subject than she had yet been, for the first words Mr. Cuthbert addressed to her, upon his entrance, were—"I am delighted to perceive, my sweet love, that you have at length contrived to make acquaintance with the celebrated individual who has just left your box. You were, of course, too much occupied by your duty to the Regent during the night of your ball, to make acquaintance with him, or, in fact, to pay him the sort of attention which his position in the very first society demands. I understand that he has been out of town for the last week or ten days, which must be our excuse for not having invited him to dinner. I mean to ask the Duke of D—— and the Marquis of L—— to meet him. They have neither of them ever dined with me before ; but as the honour, which I am informed is so soon to be conferred upon me, will render it absolutely necessary for me to increase the circle of my acquaintance among the nobility, I think I cannot take a better opportunity than will be afforded, if we can be fortunate enough to secure the company of this young gentleman. People of the very highest rank are, I am assured, begging for invitations to meet him."

Mrs. Cuthbert looked in the face of her husband, as he made this long speech, with the most earnest attention ; for it had struck her, ere he had proceeded far in it, that he might, for the purpose of avenging himself for the injury inflicted on his dignity by her sister's marriage, be intending to vex her by speaking of this new connection with what he might intend for the most bitter irony. But before he had reached the end of it she was quite sure that it was not in this way she could

interpret the mystery, for there was so genuine an air of full-blown pomposity in his manner of announcing his intention of conferring on contending nobles a favour they were struggling to obtain, that the fact, however improbable it might seem, became evident to her understanding at last ; namely, that in some unaccountable way or other Charles Marshdale had "achieved greatness."

Yet, obvious as this inference appeared, it was really very difficult for her to receive it, for how had it happened that in none of her (of late unanswered) letters from home, any mention had been made of this most astounding circumstance ?

Nevertheless, she now felt that the case was too plain to be doubted. Accident, or the intimacy often arising from a college acquaintance, might have led, though not very easily, to some of the scenes of which her own box had been the theatre, but nothing could account for Mr. Cuthbert's speaking of him as he had done, save the fact of his having received the stamp of fashion from some source or other.

But even when this fact was fully established in her mind, there was another, concerning which she was equally anxious to be satisfied. Did Mr. Cuthbert know the real name, and the real parentage, of the individual who was to be invited to meet the Duke of D—— and the Marquis of L——, as the greatest favour that could be conferred on them ?

It seemed probable that a very short question would enable her to obtain this information ; and Mrs. Cuthbert, as we have seen, was in a very courageous frame of mind ; but, nevertheless, she had not courage to ask this short question. The idea of receiving Charles Marshdale at her house (not only with honour, however much he might deserve it, but) with kindness was delightful to her. For, was he not the brother of Godfrey ? Was he not the brother-in-law of her own dear Mary ? and should she hazard the enjoyment of the comfort that had been obtained for her by this strange celebrity, merely for the sake of knowing immediately a fact of which it was next to impossible she could long remain ignorant ? So she only bent her head in reply to what Mr. Cuthbert said to her, and then directed all her attention to the stage.

But Mr. Cuthbert was in too happy a frame of mind to remain long silent. The Prince Regent had given him a nod, and his well-informed friend had repeated the assurance that everybody expected he would immediately be made a peer. The result of all this was, that Mr. Cuthbert speedily withdrew his lady's attention from the scene, by saying, "Do just look into the Duke of D——'s box, Harriet ! Is it not perfectly extraordinary what a fuss they all make with this Mr. Martin Marshdale ? That is his name, I think, as well as I can make

it out ; but nobody appears quite certain about his name yet, as it seems to me, for some people call him by one name, and some by another. But this, you know, is one of the rare cases in which a name does not signify at all. I was rather glad, however, when I heard that one of his names was Marshdale, to remember that you did not know him by sight when you saw him at your own ball. For, to tell you the truth, my sweet love, if he were as famous as Walter Scott himself, I should not choose that he should call himself a relation, or, at any rate, a near connection of yours."

After the pause of a moment, Harriet determined, let the consequences be what they might, to inform her husband that the celebrated young student, whose acquaintance he was so anxious to cultivate, was no other than the brother of the Godfrey Marshdale whose marriage with her sister had caused the violent indignation which he had thought proper to express to her a very few hours before. For, however judicious she had deemed it to ask no questions, she tacitly assenting to what was untrue accorded neither with her temper nor her education.

But before she could speak the words which it was her honest and courageous purpose to say, a face, the expression of which was unmistakably that of official importance, presented itself, and said, while bestowing a look of intelligence upon the husband, at the same time that he bowed profoundly to the wife, "I have it in commission from his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, to inform Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert, that his Royal Highness leaves Carlton House for the Pavilion to-morrow ; and that it will give him pleasure to see the Pearl of his Duchy, and her excellent spouse, among the friendly faces that will greet him on the Marine Parade."

The object of this important embassy being accomplished, the ambassador instantly retreated, his haste being sufficiently explained by a movement in the Royal box, which evidently rendered his instant return necessary, unless he meant to forfeit the honour of attending upon his Royal Master to his carriage.

Had the words which Mrs. Cuthbert was about to speak been of a nature materially to affect the interesting question of her own life or death, her common sense would have prevented her uttering them at that moment. Preaching to the winds, and haranguing the waves, have been considered as vain enterprises ; but they might have seemed rational compared to the hopeless attempt of withdrawing Mr. Cuthbert's attention from the message which he had just received.

All the intellect he had in the world had hung upon the lips of the nuncio while he uttered it ; and this was now all

CHAPTER XXXI.

NOTWITHSTANDING all her troubles, the young Harriet had no sooner laid her head upon her pillow, than her eyes closed without an effort, and she slept soundly till morning. The sleep of the young is, indeed, refreshing, for it not only refreshes the body, but the mind also. She thought, when she awoke, of her happy sister, till she forgot her silly old husband; and of the mysterious glory that seemed to encircle the brow of that dear sister's new brother, till she forgot the Prince Regent, and his disagreeable command that they should present themselves before his troublesome royal eyes at Brighton.

It could hardly be accounted a conjugal sin in Mrs. Cuthbert, if she received that morning from Selby, with more pleasure than pain, a message from her master, signifying that having business of importance to transact, which admitted of no delay, he was under the necessity of denying himself the pleasure of meeting her at the breakfast-table.

To tell the truth, her heart bounded with a feeling of positive happiness as she received this message; her delight in the sacred retirement of her own pretty dressing-room (which was never invaded by anything more disagreeable than Selby,) far from having diminished, had greatly increased upon her, so much so, indeed, that there were very few visits or excursions of any kind, which she would not gladly have given up, for the pleasure of passing the interval in the assured freedom which that remote little room offered her—remote, inasmuch as the highly-finished and curiously-commodious apartment in which the elaborate toilet of Mr. Cuthbert was three times in every day brought to perfection, opened from his library, which was, as we know, on the ground floor.

Her solitary breakfast being ordered, and her favourite little chaise-lounge rolled as close as might be to the balcony, redolent of the odours of mignonette, heliotropes, and geraniums, (for in those days aromatic scents were not banished for the sake of fine colouring,) she placed herself in an attitude of very particular comfort, and began to turn over the leaves of a little volume of poems which, though it had not long ago issued from the press, she had already perused at least half a dozen times from beginning to end.

This little volume, though the production of a young man totally unknown to fame, had already acquired great celebrity, and offered one proof, among many others, that the judgment of the mass, including high and low, is sure to be right when

unbiassed by the foregone conclusions of professional critics. Nay, even such, and when promulgating judgment from the highest seat, too, cannot always silence the rebellious opposition of natural taste and feeling. The biting apostrophe of "See how a minor can write!" did little towards checking the blaze of Childe Harold's fame.

The little volume which had so captivated the fancy of Mrs. Cuthbert, put forward as its principal title the name of a prize poem recently recited at Oxford, and which had borne away the palm from all competitors by a voice so general as seemingly to include the concurrence of the discomfited competitors themselves. That this prize poem was a production of great merit, can therefore scarcely be doubted, and Mrs. Cuthbert was perfectly capable of appreciating its merit, and did, in fact, appreciate it fully. But nevertheless it was not this graceful, and, in some sort, learned composition, which had seized upon her imagination with a power which for the time seemed to render every other production distasteful to her. The prize poem was of the then usual stipulated length of fifty lines; and the volume, which contained about three hundred pages, was filled by a variety of compositions of different metres and in different moods, some being meditative, some impassioned, some narrative, and some almost wholly descriptive. It would be difficult to say, upon which class the fancy of Mrs. Cuthbert hung with the greatest delight, but it would be less so to discern what the charm was which fascinated her in each. The charm was truth. No image was forced, no feeling exaggerated, no sentiment, no thought pushed beyond the modesty of nature. Harriet had quite enough of intellect, and quite enough of feeling, to enjoy the luxury of following thoughts and sentiments thus simply yet powerfully presented to her; but she was not sufficiently a critic to know why it was that she hung with such deep, and ever new delight, over the unpretending little volume which contained them.

She had purchased these very precious pages in consequence of having read two or three stanzas that had been extracted from them, in a newspaper; and never, perhaps, since the hour of her marriage, had she so ardently wished herself at home again as when poring over the pages of this little book. For it seemed to her, that the scenes so graphically described—nay, the very climate, with its shadowy mistiness and the mysterious mirage of its seaward atmosphere—were all familiar to her as if she had been born among them, and she longed to consult with Mary, and with Susan, upon the possibility of any description being felt as so very true to nature, unless it had been inspired by the identical objects which it so forcibly recalled.

The impassioned verses, too, produced a very strong effect;

upon her ; but it was not in reading these that she so particularly wished for either Mary or Susan, to assist her comprehension of their truth.

Mrs. Cuthbert, having been cured very effectually of the strange delusion which had led her to suppose herself in love with her husband, had very honestly come to the conclusion, that she never had really known what love meant, and that she probably never should. But ere she had finished her second perusal of this little volume, she began to think, that although she might never feel the passion, she could fancy it possible that Mary might ; and that if so, she had been right, oh, more than right ! she had been inspired by heaven with the generous feeling, the beautiful devotion of heart which had led her to look with all the profound indifference of contempt upon wealth and station, when brought into competition with such feelings as glowed in the pages of that treasured little book.

The circle in which Mrs. Cuthbert had lived since her marriage was very far from being what is called a literary circle, although, in the nineteenth century, no circle deserving the name of good society could exist in which there was not a sprinkling of literary men, and literary women, too ; but Harriet had never encountered any of them in a manner that could lead to intimacy, and it so happened that she had never yet heard any one discuss the merits either of the prize poem or its accompaniments. But it was not the less dear to her for that ; perhaps she might not have loved it so well had any one, speaking with the voice of critical authority, assured her that the verses were excellent. Perhaps part of her pleasure consisted in the consciousness that it was her own taste which had taught her to find in the few lines she had seen in the newspaper, the hand of the master who had not only distanced all his compeers at the university, but had taught her to think, and to feel, more profoundly than she had ever felt or thought before.

Mrs. Cuthbert was still reclining upon her chaise-lounge, and still lingering over her breakfast and her book, when Selby entered, and gave her a letter. It bore the Pennmorris postmark, and all her poetic fancies vanished in a moment, to give place to the dear reality of receiving news from "home."

Yet, notwithstanding her impatience for this news, she paused before she broke the seal, to examine the direction. It was written neither by her mother nor Mary, but by the hand of her father. At the first moment, this surprised her, because he wrote but rarely, and moreover, because her mother's last letter had promised that another should follow immediately, giving a particular account of the different alterations which were about to be made at the Vicarage, in order to make it a

comfortable home for the newly-married pair. Another instant, however, and the seal was broken, and Mrs. Cuthbert read the following lines:—

“May Heaven enable me so to perform the terrible duty before me, as to obtain the only alleviation to my misery which can be granted to me!”

The paper fell from the hands of the terrified Harriet. That her mother was dead, was the only idea which suggested itself; and it came upon her with a force of conviction that, for a minute or two, admitted not of the possibility of doubt. Then followed a sort of desperate determination to know all the torturing details of an event which had plunged her into a state of suffering so much greater than she had ever felt before, that it seemed as if now, for the first time in her life, she knew what sorrow was. This violent paroxysm of despair was decidedly a blessing to her, as the relief produced by finding the source of it imaginary, enabled her to endure the real grief which followed, infinitely better than she would otherwise have done.

After the shower of tears which blinded her had been wiped away, she read on:—

“As yet, your poor mother knows nothing of the dreadful intelligence that has been communicated to me; and not for worlds would I sully the pure and innocent happiness of poor Mary, by telling her of it. Oh! Harriet, by telling either of them one syllable of all the grief and shame that have fallen upon me!”

This was a strange sentence, perhaps, to cause Mrs. Cuthbert to raise her eyes and clasped hands to heaven, and exclaim, “Thank God!”—but most assuredly she did so, and the delightful conviction that her first terrible idea was unfounded, and that her darling mother was alive and well, seemed to be a panacea perfectly sufficient to soothe her under any other sorrows which it was possible her father could have to communicate; and thus fortified in spirit, she read on:—

“It would be a very dishonourable breach of confidence were I to name to you the person from whom I have received the terrible intelligence which causes me thus to address you, nor could my doing so benefit you in any way; it is enough that I should assure you, as I now do most solemnly, that my informant merits and possesses my entire confidence and undoubting faith. This person, whose name I have promised you shall never learn from me, has been an eye-witness of the facts of which it is now my most painful duty to speak. I need not preface what I have to say by telling you that my true and heartfelt loyalty to my sovereign and his family has ever been a warm and powerful feeling within me; nor is it a small addition to the bitter grief which has fallen upon me, that it is the

son, the son and royal heir of George the Third, who has brought it upon me!

"Perhaps I need go no farther? Perhaps your guilty heart already tells you what it is I have heard, and of what nature the misery is which I deplore? But it is cowardly to shrink thus from the details of a subject upon which it is so imperatively my duty to dilate.

"It has been reported to me, Harriet, that the Prince Regent of England has added, or is adding, your name to those of the many guilty and unhappy women whom his gallantries have disgraced.

"Ask your own heart, Harriet, what mine must have felt on hearing this.

"I am informed, too, that the coquetry by which you have contrived to attract his notice and fascinate his senses, has been a theme of universal observation and reproach.

"You have contrived, also, I am told, so effectually to blind your unfortunate husband, that he has permitted you to give a ball, prepared expressly and most ostentatiously for the gratification and amusement of the Prince, and in a style of expense altogether disproportionate both to Mr. Cuthbert's income and his rank; but it is stated that your influence over him is so great, that there is no folly which you might not induce him to commit.

"One of the circumstances which is said to have created the most invidious remarks, and to have given birth to the most degrading suspicions, was your having condescended to assume two different characters at your own ball; in the first of which you presented yourself before the Regent as a Cornish peasant-girl, (he having before distinguished you publicly by the epithet of 'the Pearl of his Duchy;') and in the second, in the still more objectionable costume of Anne Boleyn; thus, yourself pointing out, as it were, the intimacy which has so conspicuously existed between this royal personage and your degraded self.

"All this requires no commentary. You know whether or not the Prince has thus distinguished you; and you know, likewise, whether you really sacrificed your own character at the shrine of his vanity, by dressing yourself, when receiving him, in the manner above described. All that is left for me to do is less to admonish than to implore you. Retire to the shelter of your own dwelling! Receive this dangerous guest no more! Let no temptation of gaiety induce you to take part in any fête where it is possible you may meet him! Plead illness, if it be necessary, as an excuse for this retreat! I WILL NOT believe that your sin has exceeded that of a weak, vain woman, who has forgotten that shame is often the dreadful

penalty for the gratification of vanity. The lamentable blindness of your aged husband is most unfortunate ! Had you not unhappily found the means of deluding him, he must have possessed sufficient power to have prevented your unprincipled vanity from leading you to commit the follies which you have thus made your name the common theme of slanderous tongues.

"But although I think that were Mr. Cuthbert's eyes once opened, he would effectually withdraw you from the scenes in which you have so ill-conducted yourself, I cannot, as yet, persuade myself to believe that it is my duty to open them. I say as yet, my poor unfortunate child, because, should any further information reach me, which may lead me to believe that this remonstrance has been in vain, I shall deem it the wisest, and therefore the most righteous course, to awaken him to a sense of your situation and his own. Wring not your mother's heart by any allusion to this letter, unless you feel in your own that your conduct will continue such as to render the keeping her long in ignorance of the subject of it impossible !

"Your unhappy father,

"HENRY HARTWELL."

Where can a simile be found that may illustrate the condition of Mrs. Cuthbert's mind after reading this letter ? Sorrow seemed to have nothing to do with it ; and yet that she was most pitiaibly unhappy is most certain. But there was a feeling stronger than sorrow which seized upon her heart too vehemently to leave her conscious of any other. The conduct of her husband, with regard to the Regent and herself, was now as clearly visible to her as it had hitherto been unsuspected, and the baseness, the vileness, of exposing her name to calumny, for the sake of obtaining the object of his contemptible ambition from the Prince, appeared to her in all its enormity.

Hitherto, when feeling her young heart heavy within her, in consequence of her having mistaken the nature of her own sentiments towards the man she had married, as well as the nature and value of all the qualities by which her childish fancy had been caught, she reasonably enough felt that the blame was more hers than his, and that the best atonement she could make to her riper reason, for the folly into which her youthful vanity had betrayed her, was to endure the consequences of it patiently, and to make the best of the lot she had herself chosen.

This state of mind, though not enviable, was, at least, reasonable, and led to that sort of practicable resignation which is sometimes the result of genuine philosophy, but which, in her, arose chiefly from an honest consciousness that she had been much more to blame herself in accepting Mr. Cuthbert, than he

had been in showing her, when it was too late, that it was not possible she could be happy as his wife.

But all such feelings were now overpowered, stifled, and destroyed by indignation ; and in contemplating her own unhappy condition now, she was only conscious of being a deeply-injured woman.

How her father had become so accurately acquainted with the detestable exhibition which she had been so basely beguiled into making of herself at her ball, she knew not, nor could even guess ; neither did she bestow half a moment in attempting it. She felt that it mattered not. The statement which had been made to her father was a true statement in every point, save in the motives attributed to her. And how could she wonder at, how could she blame, the blunder ? Her eyes once opened, she saw plainly enough, that if the Prince Regent was indeed considered to be a person with whom it was possible for ladies to flirt, her conduct towards him could not, by any imaginable degree of candour in the observers, have been interpreted as proceeding from anything but the most audacious and unprincipled coquetry.

For where could he find an imagination vile enough to suggest the possibility that she might be acting under the positive and precise commands of her husband ?

All this was as plainly and clearly visible to her judgment now, as the fairest page of letter-press could have been to her eyes.

And then came the tremendously important question of "what was she to do ?"

It was indeed a question full of difficulty ; for, whatever line of conduct suggested itself to her, objections unanswerable seemed to arise against pursuing it.

Were she to content herself by assuring her father of her innocence, without betraying to him the infamous policy of her vain and unprincipled husband, she felt that not all the confidence which her life-long truthfulness might have inspired could suffice to overpower in his mind the evidence of facts recorded, as it seemed, without exaggeration, and to the existence of which so many witnesses would doubtless be as willing as they certainly were able, to testify.

Were she to lay before her husband the letter of her father, and announce to him her resolution of never again submitting her conduct to his guidance, what could she expect but that her father and his information would be treated with the most insolent contempt, and she herself, perhaps, be punished for the first overt act of rebellion to matrimonial authority, by being consigned to the durance of the Welsh Castle, with which she had been already threatened ?

Did she at once decide upon withdrawing herself from the house of her now detested husband, and seeking the shelter of that dear paternal roof which she had so blindly forsaken, what a sea of troubles would she have to encounter!

Was it certain—nay, was it even probable—that her father, after hearing her conduct so falsely yet so faithfully described, would receive the runaway wife, and restore her to his home and his heart?

She felt that it could not be.

Or, were she to answer her father's letter by first acknowledging the truth of his statements, and then explaining to him the manner in which she had been betrayed into acting in the hateful way described, must not the most hopeless family disunion be the consequence if she remained under the protection of her husband, or the most certain public disgrace if she withdrew from it?

Where was the human being to whom she could at that moment apply for counsel? Alas! there was not one; no, neither male nor female; there was not one to whom she could with propriety reveal her real situation, and from whom she could ask advice as to the line of conduct which it would be "discreetest, best," for her to pursue, in order to escape from it.

In this desperate perplexity she speedily felt that she must look to her Heavenly Father and to herself alone, for that there was none other who could help her; and having once convinced herself of this, and uttered a short but earnest prayer, her courage, or rather, perhaps, her indignation at the undeserved disgrace under which she suffered, inspired her with a much greater degree of confidence in her own powers than her foregone history justified.

The reverie which followed might be rendered thus: "I have deliberately sacrificed every hope of other happiness, for the sake of becoming the wife of a gentleman of graceful manners, large fortune, and good position in society. I find that he is a vain, low-minded, and most unprincipled villain. Does this discovery give me the power of undoing what I have done? No! But it gives me the power of perceiving the real nature of my own situation, and of setting myself on my guard against permitting it, by my own weakness, to become worse.

"I will not hide myself from the world, as if conscious of being too guilty to appear before it; but neither will I continue to be the contemptible tool of an old man's heartless vanity, by appearing before it as I am."

This resolution, which was very deliberately taken, did not, however, save her the painful task of replying to her father's unanswered letter; and the consciousness that it must be done, at length suggested the idea of making one cautious effort to

obtain the assistance of her father himself, but in such a manner as not to involve either of them in any of the difficulties which her long meditation had made her resolve to avoid.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was thus, then, that Mrs. Cuthbert replied to the terrible letter of her father:—

“It is needless, my father, my dear, dear father, for me to attempt wringing your heart, by describing to you how your letter wrung mine. I would to Heaven that instead of returning pain for pain, I could console you by the assurance that what you have heard respecting my conduct relative to the Prince Regent was untrue. But this, I grieve to say, I cannot do. As far as I am able to judge by your letter, nothing has been reported to you beyond the truth, and you have probably not heard all that might have been told, had your informer been for ever by my side. God grant that you may live long enough, my dearest father, to converse with me on this subject when no danger can threaten either of us from my speaking with the most fearless candour on the subject.

“But that time is not come yet.

“Your advice, though given greatly in the dark, my dearest father, shall be as nearly followed as I can contrive to do it, without imprudence. But to prove to you that I am not altogether a coward, I will venture to assure you that I should not have the slightest objection to your communicating to Mr. Cuthbert the reports you have heard, and the interpretation which has been put upon my dress, &c. I really think this is the very wisest thing you could do.

“But though I should not at all object to your entering upon this subject with Mr. Cuthbert, I hope you will continue to avoid doing so with my dearest mother and Mary. It would vex them cruelly, and their hearing of it could not possibly do any good.

“May God bless you all, my dear, dear friends, and continue to the whole of your beloved circle the happiness you all so well deserve.

“If you do keep this secret from my mother and Mary, I shall hope to hear from them as usual, and shall answer their letters as if I had not received any from you. Believe me, my dearest father, notwithstanding all you have heard to my disadvantage, to be—

“Your affectionate, though not always obedient, daughter,

“HARRIET CUTHBERT.”

"Should my father take my hint, and write on this hateful subject to my husband," thought Harriet, "it cannot make him speak of my dear family more bitterly than he has done already, and it may make him, for very shame, less openly desirous of risking the character of his wife, for the sake of winning the favour of his Prince."

How far Mrs. Cuthbert might have been right, or how far she might have been wrong in supposing that a letter from her father would have produced a beneficial effect on the mind of her husband was never put to the proof, for Mr. Hartwell never wrote to him at all.

Poor Harriet's letter had, in truth, been most lamentably misinterpreted by her unhappy father. She began by acknowledging that what he had heard was true; but this frankness, while it removed the last shadow of doubt as to the correctness of the dreadful information he had received, produced an impression as far as possible from being in her favour.

There was, as he fancied, something so light, so careless, so indifferent—his aching heart almost whispered, so hardened—in the manner of her avowing the truth of the statement which had been made to him, that he trembled from head to foot as he read it, and his bitter agony found not the relief, from the tears which coursed each other down his cheeks, which a woman's might have done; for tears fall not without much suffering from a father's eyes.

It was decidedly rather fortunate than otherwise, that there were at this time other subjects of disquietude at Penmorris, which not only in some degree prevented the good vicar's mind from dwelling as exclusively as it might otherwise have done, on poor Harriet's supposed ill-conduct, but as they were of a nature not only to interest the whole family, but to be openly discussed among them, the clouded brow and grave demeanour of the deeply-suffering father led to no embarrassing inquiries from his family.

They were all anxious and uncomfortable, and if he appeared to be more so than the rest, it was attributed to his feeling that had he exercised rather more authority over those around him, the evil they were lamenting might have been avoided.

This vexatious interruption to the happiness of both the families which had followed the marriage of Godfrey and Mary, arose from the imprudence of Mrs. Montagu. This eccentric but warm-hearted old lady had so completely persuaded herself that there were no persons within reach of Mrs. Osterly who were sufficiently her enemies to destroy the favour in which she stood with that violent-tempered lady, by reporting her intimate association with her obnoxious neighbours, that, despite all Mr. Hartwell could say to the contrary

she not only broke through all former regulations respecting the not entering the doors of the condemned Vicarage, but actually had the extreme imprudence to put her arm under that of the vicar, as she walked with him through the street of the village, to visit a poor family, whom he particularly wished to recommend to her benevolence.

There are many instances on record, and very many more that have never been recorded at all, which prove the frequent existence of unselfish feeling, and most genuine and generous kindness to each other, among the very poorest of the poor. But it is equally true, and perhaps less wonderful, that different feelings are also often found; and these, perhaps, more frequently show themselves when some act of munificence, in which they are not included, is performed before the eyes of suffering beings, who feel it difficult to believe that any misery can more urgently require relief than their own.

And thus it happened when Mrs. Montagu was seen for many days successively to enter the cottage of Betty Roberts, without pausing at the door of her neighbour Sally Day, to inquire how she did after the death of her baby.

It is probable that up to this time Mrs. Montagu had been very tolerably correct in her opinion that there was no one who thought it worth while to seek the austere presence of the lady of the manor, for the purpose of reporting her rebellious intimacy with the well-beloved vicar of the parish. But the feelings of Sally Day, under the unfortunate provocation above mentioned, were too vehement to be restrained, either by respect for the vicar, or any doubts respecting her reception from the awe-inspiring Mrs. Osterly. "If this be the sort of one-sided charity she carries on now," muttered Mrs. Day, "I should like to know what chance we shall have, by-and-by, if this one comes to be the lady over us? Let what will happen, it can't be worse for we, no-ways."

This was the reasoning which followed Mrs. Montagu's fourth visit to the sick Betty Roberts; and before she returned to the Manor House after the fifth, Mrs. Day had been already there, had got admitted, upon pretence of having "something very particular to tell," to the presence of Mrs. Osterly, and had sobbed forth a dismal statement of her own sufferings, and of its being so cruel hard to see Mrs. Montagu and the parson always going about arm-in-arm together into every house but hers, and that only because she never had, nor never would, behave to anybody as if they were lady of the manor as long as their own blessed lady was above ground.

"Arm-in-arm!" shrieked Mrs. Osterly in a voice that made her visitor tremble. "Do you mean to tell me, woman, that

my cousin, Mrs. Montagu, was ever seen arm-in-arm with the unrighteous priest who has dared to marry his beggarly daughter to a relation of mine?"

"For the love of all that is holy, my lady, don't be pleased to scare me so, by misdoubting me for a liar!" replied the half-repentant Mrs. Day, who began to fear that she had raised a tempest too violent for her to stand in.

This remonstrance, however, led to a long conversation, in the course of which were brought to light a good many of the sins and iniquities of Mrs. Montagu; and, in order to obtain the information she wanted, Mrs. Osterly so far calmed the terrors of her voice and manner as to encourage the woman to proceed with a tale that was evidently of sufficient interest to deserve a reward. But when, in consequence of a long string of interrogatories, Mrs. Sarah Day broadly stated that Mrs. Maberly Montagu had been present at the marriage of Godfrey Marshdale and Mary Hartwell, the lady of the manor lost all command of herself, and exclaimed, in a tremendous paroxysm of rage, "Woman, you lie!"

How patiently the ill-treated Mrs. Day might have endured this accusation, had nothing occurred to divert her wrath, it is impossible to say; for scarcely had Mrs. Osterly spoke, when a frightfully convulsive movement distorted her features, and, as it seemed, the muscles of her right arm and leg also; and, as she had thrown herself very forward in her chair, as if to catch the words for which she was listening, she lost her balance, and fell to the floor upon her face.

The screams of the woman speedily brought Miss Shriftly and several servants to the room, who immediately discovered that the lady of the manor was in a fit.

Miss Shriftly, who knew the rather peculiarly violent temperament of her protectress, immediately suspected that something had probably been said to her by the trembling woman with whom she was found tête-à-tête, which had had the effect of putting her in a passion; and so ably did she cross-examine this frightened witness, that, before her patroness had been raised from the ground, she had not only elicited the subject of her conversation with the old lady, but even the identical statement, with its vehement reply, which immediately preceded the seizure.

As little time as could be expected was lost before medical advice was summoned and obtained; and Mrs. Montagu returned from the spot where the walls of the New Five-Elms mansion were rapidly advancing, just in time to hear from the apothecary that Mrs. Osterly had had a pretty sharp touch of palsy, but that its effects seemed to be yielding to the remedies.

he had prescribed, and that he should not be at all surprised to find, upon his return from another visit in the neighbourhood, that she had recovered her speech.

Meantime, his orders were precise, that she was to be kept in a darkened room, and that nobody should be permitted to speak in her hearing, unless she showed herself sufficiently recovered to answer them without making a painful effort to do so.

After these orders, it was evident that Mrs. Montagu and Miss Shrifflly would do better to go out of the room than to remain in it, and they retired accordingly, without any scruples of conscience, to the dining-room. They took their soup in gravity and silence ; but, as the repast proceeded, Miss Shrifflly felt so strong a desire to inform Mrs. Montagu what had passed between the venerable invalid and Mrs. Sarah Day—probably for the purpose of seeing how she would bear it—that she could not resist it ; and accordingly related to her decidedly attentive listener all that she had herself learned from Mrs. Day.

The information was certainly rather startling ; and that the present position of affairs was extremely interesting to Mrs. Maberly Montagu cannot be doubted. She had more than once, of late, seen very substantial reasons for believing that her Cousin Osterly had very recently made a new will, and, moreover, that this new will was in her favour. This information was not communicated in any particularly friendly or affectionate manner, but the fact was pretty clearly inferred by sundry instructions relative to tenants whom it was necessary to look after sharply, lest they should turn up the rich grazing ground, under pretence of making a kitchen garden ! Such ridiculous notions of luxury and extravagance, she said, ought to be discouraged, as much for the sake of keeping down the aspiring new ways of the farmers and their impertinent wives, as for the protection of the grazing ground ; and these philippics generally ended with the words, “Do you hear, Cousin ?” In short, Mrs. Montagu strongly felt that her often-varied destiny now drew rapidly towards its crisis, and that the important question of whether she was, for the rest of her days, to be rich or poor, hung altogether upon whether Mrs. Osterly recovered her speech before she died, or died before she recovered her speech.

Miss Shrifflly’s account of the woman’s statement was much too distinct to leave any doubt on the mind of Mrs. Montagu as to what was likely to be the result, if her cousin recovered. No one could judge better than herself of the truth of Miss Shrifflly’s relation, for did she not know that every word of the statement attributed by it to Sally Day was true ?

* Mrs. Maberly Montagu was a really good woman, and she now gave a proof of it by the terrified sort of feeling which

seized upon her lest she was going to be wicked. She said very little in reply to Miss Shrifly's statement, but she went to her chamber, and prayed heartily—yea, heartily—for power to quench the wish which she feared might arise in her heart, that her cousin might die before she could alter her will.

There was a strength, almost perhaps a vehemence, of feeling and of thinking, in Mrs. Montagu, that might often have moved any one, who loved her less than Mary and Godfrey, to smile at her oddities and her energy; but there would have been nothing enviable in the merry spirit of any one who had felt inclined to smile at the earnest prayer of this truly Christian woman, that she might not be led into temptation.

The apothecary's prediction was about half-way fulfilled; he found that Mrs. Osterly had perfectly recovered her senses—that is to say, she evidently knew every one who approached her, and the most remarkable proof of this was the manner in which she was affected when Mrs. Maberly entered her room. The blood, which had seemed banished from her whole body, returned for a moment to her face, and she made a frightfully vain effort to speak.

The apothecary immediately perceived the effect of her presence, and, leading her from the room, inquired, with the authority of his profession, whether anything had passed between herself and her cousin, of a nature that might account for the evident agitation which her presence occasioned.

"Nothing has passed between us; but I know, from Miss Shrifly, that she has been told this morning of my having visited a person whom she wished me to avoid," replied Mrs. Montagu, with her usual frankness.

"Then it will be desirable that you should not appear before her again, madam," returned the apothecary; "for agitation of any kind may bring on another seizure, which would probably be fatal."

It was no feeble spirit which had sustained this singular old lady through the many rough joltings and joggings which it had been her lot to encounter, without ever for an hour failing her, or permitting her to doubt her own power of sustaining patiently—nay, contentedly—whatever Heaven should send. But there was something in her present situation that certainly tried her magnanimity severely. She misdoubted herself and the honesty of her own feelings, for the first time in her life, and this gave a greater shock to her philosophy than all the misfortunes she had ever encountered.

But the good lady would have been more miserable still, could she have been conscious of judging any other human being with as much injustice as she now judged herself. That she was terrified at the idea of Mrs. Osterly's reversing a will

which she had good reason to believe was made in her favour, is certain, but she was not herself aware, good soul, how very little of that terror arose from any anxiety as to her own condition.

The fact was, that she had permitted her kind heart and her fanciful head so greatly to outrun her prudence on the subject of her dear Mary's future residence, as to have given private orders to the man who was engaged to make the windows for the new mansion, that those intended for the drawing-room, and which commanded the beautiful view that had so bewitched her, should be about double the size of those the worthy yeoman had ordered—that they should be of plate glass, set in mahogany, and open upon the flower-bedecked little lawn which was to be before them.

To another workman she had, in like manner, given orders that a picturesque but substantial verandah should run along that side of the house; and to both she had enjoined the strictest secrecy, giving them, at the same, to understand, that they were to look to her for payment.

To make the matter worse, she had peremptorily insisted upon it, that both these jobs should be set about immediately; for she knew that it would be necessary, before the building was greatly advanced, that the workmen should be made aware that they were to be prepared for, and she knew also that her dear friend, Marshdale senior, being very nearly as resolute a person as herself, there might possibly arise some troublesome discussion about her costly offering which might end in its being set aside, unless it were made clearly evident that it was too late.

The greatest joy of Mrs. Montagu's life, therefore, for the last two months, had been to visit privately the respective workshops of her two secret artisans, and to watch their rapid progress.

Now the covenanted price of the two windows and their verandah amounted to the sum of one hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling, which, though moderate enough to do honour to the honesty of these secret agents, was large enough to have been utterly beyond the reach of Mrs. Montagu's purse, had not all her expenses since her arrival at the Manor House been confined to her modest charities, and to the supplying of her very simple wardrobe.

As eight months had elapsed since she had lived thus at free quarters, she had felt herself perfectly justified in thus disposing of the money she had saved during this time; but now, as she began to think it extremely probable that she might, in the course of a few hours, perhaps, be literally turned out of doors, and left to furnish herself again with a house, and replenishing from her own resources, the consciousness of her

imprudence came upon her very painfully ; and the idea that she might be driven to keep two or three very hard-working men waiting for their money, (which must be the case if she retained in her possession what would be absolutely necessary for her immediate expenses in case the misfortune she anticipated were to fall upon her,) gave her a degree of pain that was almost too much for her philosophy, and her very heart seemed to sink within her.

Of this private source of embarrassment, neither the Hartwells nor the Marshdales knew anything ; but there was enough without this to make them very uneasy concerning the future prospects of their newly-found, but dearly-valued friend.

Mr. Hartwell, in particular, felt a very painful consciousness that Mrs. Montagu's respect for himself, as well as for his calling, had, in the first instance, led her to commit the imprudence for which she was likely to suffer so severely.

There was not a single servant at the Manor House who did not know the whole story. They had all found out that Mrs. Montagu's intimacy at the Vicarage had been made known to Mrs. Osterly, and that her anger at the discovery had thrown her into the desperate condition in which she was now lying.

The vexation and anxiety which such intelligence naturally occasioned to Mr. Hartwell, sufficiently accounted for the deep depression of spirits which had fallen upon him, and which it was quite beyond his power to conceal—and nobody wondered at it.

How was it possible for any of them to be in good spirits, while believing it very likely that Mrs. Montagu might be so greatly injured, in consequence of her too fearless attachment to themselves ?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN truth, Mrs. Montagu deserved all their sympathy, for her situation was a very painful one. The singular position in which she stood was perfectly well known to every one who approached her, and probably to every one for a dozen miles round. For what mortal apothecary could have been capable of keeping so very remarkable a circumstance to himself ? Nay, even the lawyer who had made the will, the purport of which was so strongly suspected, although not yet proclaimed, was not unhappy enough to be totally without a few confidential friends to whom he could venture to breathe a gentle hint as to the real state of the case ; that is to say, that provided the lady of the manor of Penmorris departed this life without recovering her faculties sufficiently to enable her to make another will, her cousin, Mrs. Maberly Montagu, would be her heir.

This kind-spirited heiress in "posse," who really would have felt a good deal of affection for her near relation and respected benefactress, if she had ever been freely permitted to do so, did not dare, when she crept out of her room in the morning, to inquire what sort of a night the invalid had passed, lest she should be suspected of hoping to hear that she was worse; and she would greatly have preferred uttering the most dangerous treason, to asking whether her dying relative had recovered her speech.

Nor were the feelings of the household much less awake to the importance of this question than she was herself, and the temper of each might be guessed by the manner in which they severally alluded to it.

Miss Shriffly, who, to say the honest truth, was constitutionally spiteful, said to every one she met between Mrs. Osterly's door and that of the breakfast-room, "I don't think she'll live long: but I have no doubt in the world that she will recover her speech."

And when, on entering the said breakfast-room, she saw poor Mrs. Montagu as pale, as melancholy, and as silent as a ghost, her own countenance cleared up in a moment, and she said, in a tone that was much more near to being cheerful than any that was usually heard from her, "We shall hear what the doctor says when he comes, but I have watched a good many paralytic people before now, and I never saw the speech return, as you know it often does at last, without exactly the identical symptoms that Mrs. Osterly has got now."

One of the housemaids, who took it in turn to sit up, met Mrs. Montagu in the hall, and, running to open the door of the breakfast-room for her, said, but in a very pitiful voice, "Ah! dear me, ma'am! she be a deal worserer than ever! And as to her speaking more, you might just as well look to hear the church steeple begin talking."

The one address was painful as the other to poor Mrs. Montagu, who felt too wretched to remain within reach of the repetition of either, and though she would willingly have avoided doing anything, at such a moment, that might be interpreted into disrespect, she was perfectly incapable of resisting the temptation she felt to go to the Vicarage, in order to soothe her sick spirit by the sight and sound of kind eyes and kind voices. But there certainly was a weight at her heart, which not even their genuine affection could enable her to shake off; and the terrible consciousness, on the part of the Vicarage family, that they were in truth the cause of it, cast so heavy a gloom upon them all, that the private and most bitter sorrow of the unhappy vicar was not likely to be commented upon amidst the general sadness.

Meanwhile, the condition of Mrs. Osterly continued apparently unchanged. Day after day passed without either her doctor or her nurses being able to detect any perceptible alteration. She swallowed the nourishment that was put into her mouth, and seemed to sleep for many hours both of the day and night.

The first symptom that seemed to indicate what Mr. Bates, the apothecary, called a revival of her faculties, showed itself by sundry grimaces and gruntings, that seemed very unequivocally to indicate that she was angry with somebody or something. Mr. Bates seemed extremely proud of this, and, though a very modest man, did not scruple to attribute it to the success of his applications.

"I was quite sure," said he, looking both at Mrs. Montagu and Miss Shrifflly with an air that challenged applause, "I was quite sure that, if there was as much life in her as could make a snail crawl, I should bring it out. I shall go on, with little or no alteration, and we shall see. I should not be surprised, not the least bit in the world surprised, if she were to live six weeks or two months, and if she does, there is no man can say but what she may in some degree recover her speech before it is over."

Miss Shrifflly made no reply in words, and Mrs. Montagu made no reply at all; but when the apothecary, having pronounced his opinion as above stated, took the liberty of stretching out his hand, and of taking possession of a newspaper which lay upon the table, Miss Shrifflly condescended to give a very intelligent look to Mrs. Montagu, shrugging her shoulders the while, as much as to say, "Isn't he an idiot?" But to this friendly familiarity Mrs. Montagu made no return. She was thinking of the plate-glass windows, and the verandah, and was quite unconscious that Miss Shrifflly's grimaces were addressed to her.

This was unlucky; for the meditating upon her debts could in no way help to pay them, and the offending Miss Shrifflly, which this inattention did very severely, was attended by very unpleasant consequences. Had her intelligent look and shrug been properly attended to at that moment, Miss Shrifflly was in a humour to have entered at full length with Mrs. Montagu into the present state of affairs at the Manor House, and was extremely well inclined to state it as her opinion; that Mrs. Osterly was in a sort of condition that made it a perfect sin to torment her with any more experiments; and that as for trying to make her speak, or pretending to understand her if she did, it was much too cruel and too wicked to be thought of.

For Miss Shrifflly was beginning to get exceedingly tired of her own state of suspense, and well inclined to wheedle herself into the good graces of the person who, in all human probabi-

lity, would be in possession of the premises before two months were over.

Her feelings, however, underwent a most complete change when she found that the friendly colours she had thus hoisted were wholly unattended to. A more masculine spirit would probably have muttered an oath, but Miss Shrieffly only murmured the little word, "So!"

Before the Penmorris post departed on that day, however, the following epistle was consigned to its care:—

"To JOHN FREDERIC AUGUSTUS CUTHBERT, Esq.

"It is by no authority from your venerable relative, sir, that I now address you; but solely from my own sense of right. Mrs. Osterly, sir, has had a paralytic stroke, beyond all question brought on by a vehement emotion of very natural anger, occasioned by the conduct of Mrs. Maberly Montagu. What the nature of that offensive conduct was, it is not necessary for me now to dilate upon. Suffice it to say, that although the greatly-irritated Mrs. Osterly has, for the present, completely lost the power of articulation, it is perfectly evident that she is still in the possession of her senses. This latter fact is, I am sorry to say, chiefly perceptible from the painful irritation of temper under which she is evidently suffering; and my own opinion is, that this irritation of temper is occasioned by the torturing recollection, poor old lady! that she has bequeathed her estate to a person who has outraged her feelings in the most cruel manner; nor will she, I am very sure, die easy unless some means can be found of enabling her to relieve herself from the heavy load that seems to burthen her conscience. Under these circumstances, sir, I feel assured that you will not blame the liberty I am taking in thus addressing you; nor can you mistake the motives which lead me to say that I think you would only be doing your duty both to yourself and to her, were you to set off on the receipt of this and present yourself before her. That her bodily frame is greatly under the influence of her passions, is a fact that cannot be doubted; and that the sudden sight of you, sir, whom I have no doubt she feels she has deeply injured, may produce a restorative effect, which may enable her to make her peace with you, and with her own conscience, is highly probable. Should you decide upon following my advice, I must request that you will not let Mrs. Montagu know that you come in consequence of a summons from me.

"Trusting that you will do justice to the feelings which have dictated this letter, I beg to subscribe myself,

"Your faithful and obedient servant,

"SARAH SHRIEFFLY."

Letters did not travel quite so rapidly from Cornwall to London in those days as they do now ; neither could a deliberate old gentleman, like Mr. Cuthbert, obey even so pressing a summons as that of Miss Shriuffy, in less time than four post horses required for galloping over the ground. But, notwithstanding this inevitable delay, Mr. Cuthbert arrived at Penmorris Manor House, before any very perceptible change had taken place in the condition of Mrs. Osterly.

Miss Shriuffy looked demure, and pronounced the word, "Indeed !" when a servant announced to her that he was in the drawing-room ; while nearly at the same moment another of the household knocked at the door of Mrs. Montagu's room, and communicated the same intelligence to her.

Mrs. Montagu said nothing, and the woman who had volunteered to perform this errand, for the sake of seeing how the old lady liked it, had nothing more interesting to relate when she returned to the kitchen, than that Madame Montagu turned as white as a sheet.

Certain it is, that for a few minutes after this news reached her, poor Mrs. Montagu was greatly agitated ; but her mind was not of a character to suffer this state of weakness to continue. She very speedily felt ashamed of herself, and resolutely determined to return to the same simple mode of life which she had found her little income had been sufficient to support in Wales, and which she flattered herself she could make a little more simple still in Cornwall—at least, till she had paid her lawful debts. "And this once accomplished," thought she, as she tied her straw bonnet under her chin, and prepared for a walk to the Vicarage—"this once accomplished, shall I not have cause to rejoice to the latest moment I have to live, that I accepted the invitation that brought me here ? For have I not found friends, whose society would render a desert beautiful, and a crust of bread delicious ?

And the still sensitive heart of the old lady was so warmed and cheered by this thought, that she smiled merrily, rather than scornfully, as she recalled the weakness which had made her feel so very nearly miserable a few minutes before.

Her walk was neither sad nor dull. She had a great deal to think of, and an interesting piece of news to communicate ; and, moreover, she had the delightful assurance that she was going to relate the downfall of all her ambitious hopes, to friends who would be more sorry for it a great deal than she was herself.

Had she analyzed philosophically and sincerely the cause of her recovered composure, the result would not have been very flattering to Mr. Cuthbert ; for most unquestionably it arose

from that feeling of certainty respecting what was going to happen, which, to such a mind as hers, was positive luxury when compared to doubt. She bestowed not a single thought on the ways and means which might be resorted to, in order to effect the necessary alteration in Mrs. Osterly's will, she only felt quite sure that it would be managed somehow or other. For why else was he here, after having been told, in as plain language as it was possible for pen to write, that he was never, on any pretence, to appear before the eyes of his offended relative again?

Mrs. Osterly had put a copy of this very decisive epistle into her hands within a few hours after her arrival, in order to prove to her, as she said, that she had no reason to fear any second reconciliation; yet there he was, and most assuredly without having received any invitation or permission from his dying cousin.

Mrs. Montagu knew a great deal too much about Mr. Cuthbert, to suspect him of having made the journey in the hope of receiving a parting look of forgiveness. No. Somehow or other Mrs. Osterly would be found capable of altering her will, and her will would accordingly be altered.

She had no intention, however, of hinting to Mr. Cuthbert's father-in-law, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law, that she thought in her heart it would now matter very little whether Mrs. Osterly recovered her speech or not; she only said that she was come to announce his arrival, and that she supposed it would not be long before he followed to announce it himself.

"Was he sent for, my dear Mrs. Montagu? and is he come without his wife?" said Mr. Hartwell, who was sitting in the parlour with his wife and daughter when she entered.

His voice trembled as he spoke; and Mrs. Hartwell and Mary waited, with eager eyes and clasped hands, for her answer.

"I am sorry my news has raised any hope of your seeing your daughter," said Mrs. Montagu, colouring, and connecting, for the first time, the idea of Harriet's interest with that of her husband; "Mrs. Cutbert is not with him."

And then, with one of those sharp self-accusing pangs to which her warm heart, and by no means cool head, made her subject, she coloured more highly still, as she thought how very base she must be to fancy for a moment, that Mr. Cuthbert's getting the estate would afford them any consolation for her losing it.

But neither her heightened colour, nor her embarrassed look, were perceived by her anxious friends, who, having recovered from the momentary agitation into which the improbable idea of seeing Harriet had plunged them, were again occupied wholly by her and the important interest she had at stake.

"Who sent for him?" inquired Mrs. Hartwell.

"What business can he possibly have here?" cried her pale and trembling husband.

"Has she recovered her speech?" demanded Mary.

"My dear, kind friends!" replied the old lady, while tears, half of contrition and half of gratitude, filled her eyes, "who is there in the wide world, but your dear selves, who would forget, as you seem to do, that what I lose your daughter's husband will gain?"

"What reason have you to suppose he will gain it?" cried Mary. "She cannot be more angry with you for seeing me married, than she was with him for marrying Harriet."

"My offence is the latest," replied Mrs. Montagu.

"True; I can easily fancy that this would be a sufficient reason for her again changing her mind; but presuming she has done so, how has she contrived to make him aware of it?" said Mrs. Hartwell.

"I cannot answer you, for I know nothing," replied Mrs. Montagu, "save that Mr. Cuthbert is here, and that here I am quite sure he would not be, without good reason. I, you know, am banished from her room by the orders of the doctor, for fear that the sight of me should agitate her; and it is, therefore, impossible for me to know very accurately what state she is in. You will easily believe that I do not choose to question either Miss Shrifflly or the servants. I could not fail, if I did so, of being suspected of being even worse, more selfish, more interested than I am. And, Heaven forgive me! there is no need of that! But, trust me, he would not, after all that is past, condescend to come to Penmorris Manor House unless pretty well certain that he should not come in vain."

"With what wonderful indifference you seem to speak of all this!" said Mary, looking at her with mingled admiration and surprise.

"No, my dear Mary, not indifference; I was strongly moved, I promise you, when I first heard of his arrival, and if I am so no longer, it is from resignation, and not indifference. And to what source, at least to what earthly source, do you think I turned to look for this most precious commodity? Even to you, my dear, dear friends. I remembered that it was as possible for a poor woman to live among you as a rich one, and that consoled me."

Mr. Hartwell had before left the room with a sudden movement, as if he had recollected at the moment some urgent business; but her two remaining friends, who were seated one on each side of her, both seized upon a hand, and pressing it with a genuine warmth of affection that could not be mistaken, declared with one voice, that if the Manor House were indeed not

to be finally her home, she must never seek another, save under the roof of either the mother or the daughter.

At that moment Mrs. Maberly Montagu completely forgot both the plate-glass windows and the verandah ; and had she been to choose between the estate of Mrs. Osterly and the affection of that mother and daughter, she would most unquestionably have chosen the latter.

It was from a sort of instinct, not much unlike that which makes a child look about for its mother in time of trouble, that Mrs. Montagu, on hearing of the arrival of Mr. Cuthbert, had immediately felt that she should like to walk off to the Vicarage ; and the result was more like still, for, before she had been there an hour, she thought of Mr. Cuthbert and Miss Shrifly, and even of poor Mrs. Osterly herself, with as much indifference as a comforted baby does of its cross nurse, when nestling within a shelter that seems too sacredly safe to be invaded.

"Don't go back till bed time !" cried Mary, on seeing the old lady preparing to rise from her chair ; "would it not be foolish of her, mother, to put herself in the way of Mr. Cuthbert, who is here for no purpose in the world but to do her mischief?"

"No, Mary, no !" replied the more considerate Mrs. Hartwell, "her absenting herself would be positively running away from the post, where, as yet at least, she has every right to be, and where Mr. Cuthbert has none. My poor, dear husband seems to be so very miserable at the idea of what you may lose by your friendship for us, that he has, I truly believe, taken himself off because he cannot bear to talk about it ; but were he here, be very sure he would counsel you to return home, and to meet Mr. Cuthbert at table, without condescending to testify either displeasure or surprise at his arrival."

"And I will do so forthwith," said Mrs. Montagu, "in despite of Mary, and all her beguiling ways."

On returning to the Manor House, and entering the usual morning sitting-room, which she did very courageously, without waiting to lay aside the bonnet and shawl that announced her having been walking, and, it might be, to the forbidden Vicarage, she found Mr. Cuthbert himself, together with Mr. Bates and Miss Shrifly, in very earnest consultation, as it seemed, upon some subject, which, however, was permitted to drop the instant she made her appearance ; and the silence was only broken by the quiet voice of Mr. Bates, which pronounced, "Good morning to you, Mrs. Montagu."

It was so many years since Mr. Cuthbert and Mrs. Montagu had met, that it scarcely seemed necessary for her to appear to remember him ; and as, upon hearing her name, he had abruptly turned himself towards a window, so that his long and

stately back alone was visible, the old lady speedily decided upon taking no more notice of him than he took of her ; and, not feeling any satisfaction from the consciousness that her presence was of sufficient consequence to condemn them all to silence, she only remained long enough to return the apothecary's civility by saying, " Good morning, Mr. Bates," and retreated.

" My poor unhappy Cousin Osterly !" said Mr. Cuthbert, while something like a shudder passed over him—" it is dreadful to think that her life has been sacrificed by the ill-conduct of that unfeeling woman !—God knows that I would do anything and everything that might soothe her outraged feelings or benefit her valuable health ; but I am compelled to repeat to you, sir, that at this moment I can scarcely be said to have a single hour at my command, or to be sufficiently my own master to say that I will remain here even till to-morrow. The Prince Regent has been pleased to command my presence at Brighton, sir, to which place he is about to repair immediately ; and I leave you to judge whether any motive, however strong, can justify me in refusing to obey him ?"

" You must know best, sir, about that," replied the apothecary ; " but I am quite sure that nothing could justify me in permitting anything to be done that might hasten the death of my patient ; and I think it very likely, that the suddenly seeing a near relation like yourself, quite unexpectedly, might have that effect."

Mr. Cuthbert was more provoked, more indignant, more angry, than he possibly could have been, had he not been so deeply sensible of his own increasing greatness.

The estate of Mrs. Osterly, though allowed by himself to be a pretty snug bit of property, sank into insignificance when set beside the benefits which he hoped to receive from his ' Royal Master ;' and though he had lost not a moment in obeying the summons of Miss Shrifflly, in the pleasing hope that the expenses of his coming peerage might be made easy by the recovery of the said ' snug bit of property,' he was now quite in earnest in saying, that if the effect of his presence might not be tried immediately, he must positively return to London without its being tried at all.

Mr. Bates was evidently much less struck by this mention of the Prince Regent than Mr. Cuthbert expected, which the accomplished courtier attributed to the poor man's utter ignorance as to what species of being a Prince Regent really was. But Mr. Cuthbert had no time to waste upon such philosophical speculations, just then ; and cut the conversation short, by saying, " You refuse then, sir, to let me see my cousin, though I have, in some sort, disobeyed the commands of my Sovereign

by travelling above two hundred miles for the purpose of doing so?"

"Upon my word, sir ——" began Mr. Bates.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. —— you'll excuse my not knowing your name; and also for interrupting you," returned Mr. Cuthbert; "but I really have no time to listen to anything beyond a plain Yes or No. Will you let me go up-stairs, sir, and ask my cousin how she is?"

"Well then, sir, I suppose you must, if you make such a point of it; and it may be, certainly, that the sight of you may do as much good as harm. No man can say, Mr. Cuthbert—I will defy any man, let his practice be as large as it may, to say whether——" but here the reasoning apothecary was suddenly cut short by the time-pressed courtier.

"Thank you, sir—thank you," said Mr. Cuthbert, moving towards the door; "perhaps this good lady will be kind enough to go with me. It will make my visit appear less solemn and awful, perhaps, than if you were to come too."

"Just as you please, Mr. Cuthbert," replied the completely-overpowered practitioner, "but at any rate it will be better for me to wait down here till the interview is over, in case any new symptoms shall appear."

"Just as you please, sir," replied Mr. Cuthbert. "I shall certainly not remain long, unless, indeed, my poor dear cousin should wish to detain me; but this can hardly be, for if Mrs. Osterly is in any degree in possession of her reason, I am very certain that what I shall mention to her respecting the Prince Regent will make her anxious that I should return to London as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Miss SHRIFFLY said nothing, but displayed her obedience more eloquently than any words could have done, by gliding towards the door, and holding it wide open for the honoured favourite of the Sovereign to pass through, which he immediately did, and with a degree of dignity that might have awed half the country gentlemen in England—to say nothing of the apothecaries; and then Miss Shriffly, noiselessly closing the door after her, followed him up the stairs, and into the darkened room of Mrs. Osterly.

But they did not enter it tête-à-tête. A gentle tap from the fingers of Miss Shriffly upon the door of a small room, close beside that occupied by the lady of the manor, caused it to

open, and induced a middle-aged gentleman dressed in black, to follow them.

Miss Shriffly whispered a few words to her two companions before she opened Mrs. Osterly's door, and having received an approving nod from each, stepped on before them, and entered the sick-chamber alone.

She found, as she expected, one of the female servants silently sitting beside the bed of the invalid, and, telling her that she was come to take her place for an hour, dismissed her through a door which led by a dressing-room to a staircase which communicated with the offices.

Having closed and bolted this door, she returned to that on the outside of which she had left Mr. Cuthbert and the stranger, and gently opening it again, made them a sign to enter. They did so; and then, having in some sort concealed the person of the latter by placing him in a corner formed by the wall and a large wardrobe, she opened one of the window shutters, and approached the bed, followed by Mr. Cuthbert.

"My dear lady, here is a friend come to see you," said Miss Shriffly, bending over the invalid, and taking hold of the helpless right hand which lay upon the sheet.

"Would you not like to see Mr. Cuthbert?"

There was now quite light enough to see that Mrs. Osterly^s raised her eyes with a degree of rapid sharpness, which proved very satisfactorily that she understood what was said to her.

Upon this Mr. Cuthbert stepped forward, and taking the place which Miss Shriffly yielded to him, took possession of the palsied hand also, and uttered a very affectionate inquiry after her health.

None of the violent effects which had been predicted as the probable consequence of strong emotions were produced by this address. On the contrary, Mrs. Osterly appeared to remain, for several minutes, more than usually still and tranquil, her eyes being almost immovably fixed the while on the face of the visitor.

"Give us a little more light, Miss Shriffly," whispered Mr. Cuthbert; and Miss Shriffly obeyed.

"Now then, my dear cousin, we can see one another," said Mr. Cuthbert, rather tenderly, and continued to press the palsied hand, which did not, however, repay the affectionate movement by any answering pressure, one reason for which might probably be, that the limb was insensible. The eyes of the invalid, however, were evidently not so, and there was something in their expression so nearly approaching a smile, that Mr. Cuthbert felt persuaded that she was greatly pleased to see him.

After sustaining this half-torpid, half-smiling gaze for rather

a longer time than was quite agreeable to him, he said, "My dear madam, I have been given to understand that you have showed, since this illness seized you, repeated symptoms of being ill at ease in your mind; and as I well know that there is nothing so likely to impede your ultimate recovery as mental anxiety of any sort, it has occurred to me that the best thing that can be done for you, will be to give you an opportunity of seeing your old acquaintance, and faithful man of business, Mr. Coleman; and I have, therefore, ordered him to be sent for; he is, in fact, at this moment in the room, and, ready to receive your commands, if you have any that you wish to give him."

The eyes of Mrs. Osterly were now slowly removed from the face of her cousin, and wandered vacantly round the chamber, as if seeking some one.

"My cousin is looking for you, Mr. Coleman!" said Mr. Cuthbert, rather eagerly; whereupon the lawyer immediately stepped from the corner which sheltered him, and approached the bed.

Again the eyes of Mrs. Osterly very plainly manifested her being in possession of her senses, for she now fixed them on the face of her old acquaintance the lawyer; and though the movement of her distorted mouth could scarcely be recognised as a smile, the eyes again assumed an expression which very decidedly conveyed the idea that she would smile if she could.

"I hope, my dear madam," said the lawyer, bending over her, "that ere long you will recover the power of conversing with your friends as usual; but, if you have anything upon your mind which you feel anxious to communicate, either to Mr. Cuthbert or to myself, I think it might be done by means of your left hand, writing on a slate; I have seen this done frequently without any inconvenience to the patient."

Mrs. Osterly slowly drew her shrivelled, but not yet helpless, left hand from under the shelter of the bed-clothes, and, with her eyes still fixed upon the face of the lawyer, began moving the fingers in a manner which showed that although somewhat stiff, they were by no means useless.

Mr. Cuthbert gave a slight glance to Mr. Coleman, which was replied to by a slight a nod; and then the latter took from his long coat pocket a very neat, pretty, portable slate, which he held in the most convenient manner possible within reach of the patient's left hand; and as he thus placed it, the attentive Mr. Cuthbert stepped lightly to the window, and unclosed another shutter, so as to let in a very strong stream of light on the bed, and which fell full upon the face of the sick lady.

Mrs. Osterly winked a little as this forbidden brightness fell upon her, but showed no symptom of being displeased by it;

on the contrary, she immediately closed her fingers upon the slate pencil which Mr. Coleman carefully held within her reach, and which instantly found itself in contact with the slate, that seemed to meet it at precisely the proper angle, as it were, by its own volition.

The hearts of old men are not so easily made to throb as the hearts of young ones; but nevertheless, the still healthy seat of life enclosed within the bosom of Mr. Cuthbert received at that moment some impulse which considerably accelerated its action.

The writing for the first time with the left hand, is by no means an easy task, even to persons in perfect health, and sitting in a commodious chair, at a commodious table; and it was, as may be easily imagined, considerably less easy to Mrs. Osterly under her present circumstances. But it was evident that a strong will prompted her efforts, and so patiently did she persevere in her attempt to perform the difficult task, that at length she succeeded in producing two words, which, though rather grotesque as to the form of some of the letters, were immediately read by both the gentlemen, with a facility that left no chance of their blundering.

These two words were "not yet!"

There was a look of very blank disappointment on the face of the lawyer as he read them, and he was the more vexed by this defeat, or at any rate by this delay, from perceiving that it was unnecessary, and that the ingenious device of the slate and pencil answered so well as to render his client as perfectly able to alter her will, if such were her pleasure, as ever she was in her life.

He was too much a man of business, however, to urge his client upon so very delicate a point. He was quite aware that he should be exceedingly well paid, if it so happened that the alteration in the arrangement of her affairs, which it was supposed Mrs. Osterly wished to make, could be satisfactorily arranged before the departure of Mr. Cuthbert; but this was by no means sufficient to impel him to any further efforts towards obtaining it; and he therefore quietly restored the slate to his pocket, made a bow, and retreated.

The feelings of Mr. Cuthbert on the occasion were far from being equally tranquil. There was a buzzing in his ears that seemed like a dull echo of the words—"Lord Corwyn!" He felt himself already a peer, or rather, he felt that he might by this time have been one, had he not been fooled into the belief that by turning his back upon his gracious Prince, and upon all the honours he appeared so ready to offer him, he might secure the little Penmorris estate in time to assist him in paying for another fête or two, at the which it was his fixed

purpose to display these freshly-blown honours to all the brother peers and sister peeresses he could collect.

His indignation, however, was fortunately too great for words, and therefore he uttered none, but, following the example of the lawyer, turned himself about, and walked out of the room.

His first impulse was to scold Miss Shriffly heartily ; but he remembered that he was all but a peer, and a sense of dignity caused him to abstain even from looking at her ; he therefore retired, without having pronounced a single word, to his own apartment, and, ringing the bell rather violently—it really was the only indecorum of which he was guilty—ordered his valet to get horses put to his carriage, and all articles appertaining to his toilet to be repacked with the least possible delay ; adding, with a solemnity that might have made the stoutest valet quail, “ If I am not in my carriage, and on my road to London within an hour, I shall be very seriously displeased.”

If this had been the end-all of Mr. Cuthbert's visit to the Manor House, his having made it would hardly have been worth recording ; but, unfortunately, it was not so. The post-horses which brought him the last stage were not permitted to return to their own stables without standing for a few minutes before the door of the “ Osterly Arms,” while the post-boys exchanged a few civil words with the landlord.

The most important of these words conveyed the intelligence that it was Mr. Cuthbert himself, Mrs. Osterly's banished heir, and the vicar's son-in-law, whom they had just conveyed to the Manor House. It is pretty generally known that news flies fast, but nowhere is its movement more rapid than along the straggling street of a country village. Long before the tails of the post-horses were out of sight, there was not a shop in the village of Penmorris—scarcely, indeed, was there an individual, excepting one or two who were stone deaf—to which and to whom the news of Mr. Cuthbert's arrival had not been carried.

Nor was this all. The population of Penmorris was, upon the whole, a very intelligent population ; and in a wonderfully short space of time the precise cause of his coming was so shrewdly guessed at, that I shall not go much beyond the soberness of truth if I say that every one in the parish knew what he was about as well as he did himself.

The equally well known disgrace of Mrs. Montagu, (for Sarah Day was rather proud of what she had done, and scrupled not to boast of it, saying that it was a warning to all partial people,) of course, assisted these rustic reasoners upon causes and effects considerably ; and, indeed, the only blunder they made was in the certainty of success which they attributed to the prompt measures of Mr. Cuthbert.

That these measures might ultimately prove successful, was not to be denied ; but those were mistaken—and they formed a great majority—who fancied that they had already proved so.

Among those most confidently assured of, and most entirely believing, this unfounded statement, was James Johnson, the frame-maker and glazier, who had undertaken, and in truth already executed, Mrs. Montagu's orders for the plate-glass windows which were to adorn Mrs. Godfrey Marshdale's new drawing-room.

He was a hard-working and a thrifty man, but had not become so without having yielded for a year or two to worse habits ; and the agreeable difference which he had found in his position since he had changed them, made all things connected with their improvement peculiarly precious to him, so that, among other peculiarities, he had become rather tremblingly cautious to avoid bad debts.

No sooner, therefore, was this careful individual made acquainted with all that had really happened, and all that was supposed to have happened, at the Manor House, than he resolved at once upon a measure which appeared to be both equitable and prudent, and which he conceived to be more likely than any other he could think of, to save him from the evil consequences of having given large credit to a lady who, it was now evident, had lost her best, and, for anything he knew, her only chance of being able to pay him.

Although the Hartwell family, on hearing that the husband of their daughter was likely to inherit the property once intended for their friend, had absolutely forgotten that the change would bring an accession of wealth to her, Mr. James Johnson had not, and it appeared to him that nothing could be so natural and proper as that the family of Mr. Cuthbert's wife should be applied to for their advice and assistance in his present anxiety. He did not forget that he had promised Mrs. Montagu to keep the order she had given a great secret, particularly from the family at the Vicarage, but he most sincerely thought, poor man, that the attending to such an idle punctilio at such a moment would be much more like proving himself a fool than an honest man.

It was therefore, with a conscience perfectly void of offence that he repaired to the Vicarage for the purpose of telling his kind patrons and friends there all about it, but certainly not without some little hope that they would stretch forth a helping hand to him in his trouble.

He reached the kitchen of the Vicarage while Mrs. Montagu was still in the parlour ; and having received this piece of information in reply to his inquiry whether he might see either his reverence or "madam," he asked, and readily found leave,

to seat himself "till such time as the company was gone." And accordingly, within two minutes after Mrs. Montagu had been seen to depart, Mr. James Johnson made his appearance at the parlour door.

"Come in, Johnson," said Mrs. Hartwell, kindly. "Did you want to see Mr. Hartwell? He is gone out, and I don't know where to find him. Will speaking to me do as well?"

"Why, yes—I see, mum, it would be much of a muchness," replied Mr. Johnson, shutting the door, and advancing towards her, as she sat beside her daughter at the little work-table; "and though there is a little mixture like of a secret in what I have got to say, I can't but think that it would be right and fitting that all your good family should know of it, seeing that things be as they be."

The worthy glazier then proceeded to open his case with great perspicuity; first repeating very accurately the order he had received from Mrs. Montagu, together with her injunction of secrecy, and then dilating upon the perfect confidence in her credit, which her generally-understood position at the Manor House had inspired.

After this, followed the equally well-known report of her disgrace, the arrival of Mr. Cuthbert, doubtless in obedience to a summons from the dying Mrs. Osterly, and lastly, the very important fact, that Mr. Coleman, the lawyer, had been sent for to the Manor House that very morning, "to alter Mrs. Osterly's will again," and that he believed he was there a-doing of it, at that very moment.

This statement was listened to by both Mrs. Hartwell and Mary with a much greater degree of pain than it was at all Mr. James Johnson's intention to give them. All that he hoped or expected was, that the parson and his family would stand his friends, and promise to see him paid, first or last, either by the old lady herself, or else by the help of young Madam Cuthbert, who was to get all the money; or else, again, by the honourable feelings of Mr. Godfrey himself and his worthy father, who never, he thought, would suffer a poor hard-working man to be ruined for what had been done for the beautifying and benefit of their own property.

Nor was Mr. James Johnson disappointed; on the contrary, he left the Vicarage in a state of much more perfect contentment than he had expected; for, after remaining silent for a minute or two after he had finished his statement, Mrs. Hartwell, without exchanging either a word or look with her daughter, replied, "Be under no anxiety, Johnson, about your money. I pledge you my word that you shall be paid as soon as your work is completed."

"God bless you, mum! I be truly thankful for that!"

"'Twould have been cruel work to have made a ruined man of me, after all," replied the happy glazier; and, having made the very lowest bow he ever performed, he departed.

"My dearest, dearest mother, what have you said!" exclaimed Mary, who had turned very pale upon hearing a demand which had pained and terrified her in many ways. "How is it possible for you to find the means of paying eighty-seven pounds? Did he not say that his bill would amount to eighty-seven pounds, or rather more?"

"Yes, dear Mary, he did," replied her mother; "and had the sum been less—that is to say, had it been at all within the possibility of our paying it ourselves, I might have been less prompt in my answer."

Mary looked harassed and puzzled.

"This sounds like a paradox; but I will explain it. Do you remember the little private interview which our dear Harriet insisted upon having with me the morning she was married? Do you remember her turning you out of the room?"

"Yes, perfectly, mamma. But what of that?"

"I will tell you now, though, as she made a secret of it, dear creature, I have never named it to you before," replied Mrs. Hartwell. "The moment we were alone, she knelt down before me; and amidst the tenderest and most coaxing caresses, made me give her a promise, that if at any time we were in want of a little extra money, I would remember her pin-money, and give her the delight of supplying it. I did promise her; and though I certainly did not anticipate, when I did so, the chance that the performance of it would ever be so convenient to me as it is likely to be now, I was quite in earnest when I made the promise, as the earnestness of her demand, dear soul, deserved I should be. If, indeed, as I much fear, our dear, imprudent friend is disinherited, the having Johnson's receipt enclosed to her shall be all she shall ever hear of her dear, generous imprudence."

"How can we be thankful enough to our poor dear Harriet for leaving us such a resource!" exclaimed Mary, inexpressibly relieved. "Only imagine, my dearest mother," she continued, "what we should have suffered if we had been obliged to let Johnson take up his account to Mr. Marshdale! Can you conceive anything much more painful? But do you feel quite sure, mother, that our dear Harriet will be able to pay such a sum as this, without inconvenience?"

"Indeed, I think so," returned Mrs. Hartwell, in an accent of very comfortable confidence. "The first half-year's income was, I know, paid in advance. This was one hundred pounds. A second hundred must have been paid many months ago, and the third also—last month, if I reckon rightly. And how can

Harriet, with all the things she took with her from hence on her hands, have been able to spend three hundred pounds since in buying more? No, Mary, you may depend upon it that the letter which I shall write to her, as soon as I have spoken to your father on the subject, will cause her the pleasantest emotion she has felt since her marriage."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE absence of Mr. Cuthbert from London, notwithstanding the slow movements of those days, did not continue long enough to occasion any great uneasiness to his lady, although he had not thought it necessary to mention to her the place of his destination, or the probable length of his absence; merely saying, when he embraced her at the moment of departure, that he had business which obliged him to leave town, but that he had no reason to believe he should remain absent above a day or two.

Whatever might have been the length of time which this rather indefinite phrase suggested to Mrs. Cuthbert, her husband's actual absence fell short of it, for she started when Selby entered her dressing-room, and announced his return.

It might be that her wish was father to the thought, but she certainly did think that any business of sufficient importance to take an old gentleman out of town with four post horses, would be likely to detain him longer than the interval which had elapsed since his departure; but she gave utterance to no sound expressive either of pleasure or pain.

Selby looked at her earnestly, but it happened now, as it had often happened before, that she was completely at fault respecting what was passing in the mind of her young mistress. Never, perhaps, had the sagacity of a tolerably clever waiting-maid been exerted more entirely in vain, than in the case of Selby and Mrs. Cuthbert. The maid was neither too young, nor too dull-witted, not to have found out as much respecting her lady's feelings and failings as it is usually given to intelligent hand-maidens, of thirty or thereabouts, to discover; neither was the mistress old enough or artful enough to conceal anything that could have been betrayed by any ordinary modes of communication. But, in like manner as Hamlet had that within which passeth show, Mrs. Cuthbert had that within which passeth telling. As to the broad fact, indeed, that she disliked the society of her husband, and that no circumstance ever produced on her an effect so nearly approaching the

appearance of happiness, as the power of sitting in her own dressing-room, without any immediate fear of being summoned by a very civil, but rather solemn inquiry whether Mr. Cuthbert might hope for her company in the little drawing-room—as to this, and as far as this went, Mrs. Selby was perfectly well informed.

But there the light left her. Susan Selby, or Mrs. Selby, as, by the invariable brevet rank of her profession, she was always called, was far from being a worthless young woman; she had a cheerful temper, and that sort of kindness of heart which led to her loving those she lived with, till some good reason, as she thought, to the contrary, became manifest.

Now there really was no good reason why those who lived with Mrs. Cuthbert should not love her, and we may therefore take it for granted that Selby did love her mistress; but there can be no doubt in the world that she would have loved her better still, had she known and understood her better.

It was no fault of Selby's, and therefore must not be imputed to her as a sin, that she had already lived with two ladies whom she believed to have quite as little partiality for their respective husbands as her present lady had for hers; but in one case this was accounted for by the very notorious partiality of the gentleman to more than one very costly fair friend; and in the other, by the scarcely more doubtful fact of her lady's strong propensity to sentimental flirtation with various accomplished individuals, more celebrated for high fashion than for high morality.

In this case Selby was very sorry; but she did not think it was her business to say much about it, and she did say very little indeed, so that her worst enemy, as her old aunt said, could never tax Susan Selby with indiscretion.

To do her justice, however, the young woman would have been much better pleased, when she entered upon her present service, if she had found the bride she had been hired to attend upon of an age more suitable to that of the bridegroom, and she sighed, with a mixed feeling of sorrow and alarm, when she thought of what was "likely to come of such a queer sort of a marriage."

For the first few months, however, which followed this terrible wedding, nothing occurred which could either excite the curiosity of a waiting-maid or puzzle it; and there was something so unmistakably innocent in little Harry's look and manner, that her experienced abigail almost began to doubt whether such a good young lady as her mistress might not, notwithstanding her youth and her beauty, make as good a wife, even to an old man, as the ugliest old lady in the world.

And Selby was still in this persuasion when the Prince Regent appeared upon the scene.

From that time forward, through a long series of very natural and very complete blunderings, Mrs. Selby abandoned all confidence in the conjugal fidelity of her mistress. She was again very sorry for it, very sorry indeed. But who could wonder? It was just what might have been expected! A young girl who would marry one old man for his houses and lands was likely enough to take another as her lover, who was quite certain of being a real king some day, and was very nearly as great as a king already.

But, notwithstanding her very sincere disapproval of this arrangement, Selby could not, for the life of her, as she confessed to her aunt, help going on loving her beautiful young mistress a good deal. "Whatever her behaviour may be," said Mrs. Selby, "her words and her looks is as innocent as those of a young child; and though she must, of course, hate and dislike her old husband like poison—which it is quite natural, you know, that she should do—she never gives him a cross word, nor a cross look, neither."

And thus matters went on between the mistress and the maid, till the terrible letter of Mr. Hartwell reached the hands of his daughter.

From that moment as sudden and complete a change took place in the feelings—nay, almost in the very character—of Mrs. Cuthbert as ever was produced on any human being in so short a space of time, and that, too, without in the least degree altering or weakening the foundations of the excellent principles in which she had been brought up.

The strong line of division that was marked in her very heart and soul between right and wrong remained as steadfastly firm as ever; but what had appeared to be her duty before she read that letter, had become, in her judgment, most completely the reverse of it afterwards; and hence arose that change in her aspect and demeanour which so greatly puzzled Mrs. Selby, and which, in truth, might have puzzled a more philosophical observer; for the feelings and reasonings which produced it were too profoundly nestled in the deepest recesses of poor Harriet's heart to be lightly disclosed to any one.

When Mrs. Cuthbert yawned upon being told that Mr. Cuthbert was expecting her presence in the drawing-room, or when her bright eye sparkled unconsciously upon learning that he was going to honour some bachelor friend by dining with him, the emotion was felt without being reasoned about or dwelt upon, and the idea of its being proper to conceal it never entered her head.

But when she suddenly discovered that the man she had pro-

misled to love and honour was a villain ; that he had deliberately insisted upon her acting in a manner which had brought upon her father the first sensation of shame that had ever wrung his heart ; that, taking advantage of her confiding ignorance, he had led her to compromise her reputation in the most fearful manner, in the hope of obtaining the object of his own contemptible ambition—when she discovered this, the very current of her blood seemed changed : the docile obedience of a wife, which she had so conscientiously endeavoured to practise as her first duty, now appeared in her eyes as so vicious a weakness that it could only be atoned for by firmly resolving to sacrifice every hope of domestic tranquillity rather than yield to it again.

It was a dreadful feeling, and fearfully approaching in its nature to hatred, which arose in the mind of this unfortunate young woman, as she contemplated the character of her aged husband such as it now stood displayed before her. There were, indeed, some few moments during which she became so well aware of this as to tremble from head to foot as she felt in her heart the entrance of this new and terrible sentiment ; and while this lasted, she very nearly decided upon eloping from his house, and beseeching, like a suppliant beggar, a shelter in that of her father.

But before this strong measure was decided on, the imagination of Mrs. Cuthbert suddenly seemed to come to her aid, and painted in such powerful and appalling colours both the situation of her family, when she should have thus returned to it, and her own also, that she forced her thoughts away from the project with a sort of vehemence that sent them galloping off at a great rate in an opposite direction.

All vehemence of feeling is dangerous when brought to bear upon questions which should be decided by judgment alone, and the subsequent adventures of the greatly-suffering Mrs. Cuthbert suggest no exception to this rule. Meanwhile, she uttered to no human being either the bitter thought which harassed her, or the various resolutions as to her future conduct which resulted from them, and Mrs. Selby was left to weary herself with conjectures which only led to the disagreeable conviction that she could not comprehend her mistress at all.

"Shall you dress for dinner, ma'am, before you go downstairs?" demanded Mrs. Selby, in a very respectful tone, on the day on which Mr. Hartwell's letter was received.

"Yes," replied her mistress, without adding another word to her reply.

The time had been, and at no great distance, when this decision would probably have been interfered with by a tender

reiteration of a wish to see her first on the part of her husband, but nothing of this kind happened now. Precisely at the time at which it was usual for her to make her appearance before dinner in the dining-room, Mrs. Cuthbert entered it.

She was more dressed than usual when she passed the evening at home, and her husband, after inquiring for her health, was saved from the disagreeable dilemma of not knowing what to say next, by feeling himself justified in adding, "Have you any engagement for this evening, my love?"

"I am going to a concert, at Mrs. Lovell's," was the reply.

It was quite impossible that any words could have been uttered with an accent more completely indifferent, or a manner more entirely free from the indication of any particular meaning than were these words now spoken by Mrs. Cuthbert; and yet, from some cause or other, which it would certainly be very difficult to define, Mr. Cuthbert felt, to his very fingers' end, that his wife was an altered being.

For an instant he raised his eyes, with the intention of looking sternly at her; but somehow his courage failed him: and yet she did not raise her eyes to look at him in return, neither was any feature of her beautiful face put in action to express any feeling whatever. But yet there was something in the settled stillness of that fair young face that disconcerted him strongly. He said no more till the word "Dinner," pronounced by the butler, caused him to turn back from the window, at which he had stationed himself, and to present his arm to her, saying, as he did so, in a voice as gay as he could make it:—

"That's well. I am excessively hungry."

* * * * *

Unfortunately, it is not a very rare case for a man and his wife to be found very deeply occupied in their separate and respective meditations, and sitting tête-à-tête, without any external symptoms of disunion between them, yet having their hearts, and their thoughts too, as widely severed as the South Pole from the North. But in no instance, perhaps, since matrimony was first invented, had this been more completely the case than during this dinner.

While the gentleman was execrating the old cousin, who, lingering between life and death, in all the uselessness of imbecility, had caused his leaving London at the most important moment of his life—namely, that in which a coronet hung, still doubtfully suspended, over his head, the lady was meditating on the surest means of snatching that coronet for ever from his grasp; and while he was pondering on the most prompt and efficient measures for binding himself and his fair wife in the tenderest ties of gratitude to their munificent Prince, she was

busily engaged in plotting a scheme that should banish them from his favour for ever.

The business of the dinner went on, and the dishes came and went. Mr. Cuthbert asked his lady to take wine with him, and she bowed over her glass without tasting it, much in the same manner that she might have done had she believed that he had drugged the wine it held ; but still their respective heads worked on, and the husband felt resolved that his low-born wife should be made useful to him ; and the wife murmured a vow in secret to her heart, that she would frustrate his infamous projects, or die in the attempt. And though scarcely a word of any kind was spoken between them, and not a single syllable uttered that bore upon the thoughts of either, they both felt a strange sort of consciousness that hostile feelings were in the very act of being born between them, and that care and caution were necessary to prevent them springing into life, armed cap-à-pie for mischief.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MRS. CUTHBERT felt perfectly certain that the morning meal of the following day would not pass over without some allusion being made to the gracious hint which had been conveyed to them that their presence was expected at Brighton. Nor was she mistaken in this, for, precisely in the mode and manner which her fancy had predicted, Mr. Cuthbert opened the discussion by saying, "I have hurried through the business which took me out of town, my dearest love, in order to prevent, as much as possible, any delay from interfering with our obedience to the gracious command of the Regent, that we should be among the first to present ourselves at Brighton. I hope that your good Selby will be ready with her trunks and imperials by the day after to-morrow? I assure you, my sweet love, that I would not delay our departure beyond Saturday morning for a larger sum than I should choose to name."

Mrs. Cuthbert received this notification in perfect silence. It was rather more sudden than she had expected, and she had not fully prepared her answer ; but though she spoke not her determination, she did not for an instant waver as to what she intended to do ; and upon Mr. Cuthbert's adding, with a charmingly tender smile, "Shall you be ready, my love?" she said, very quietly, "No, Mr. Cuthbert, I shall not."

"Perhaps, dearest, you have been giving some orders for Parade costumes to your milliner, during my absence? You

have, if so, done perfectly right, for though very fresh and elegant things may be found at the Brighton shops, every woman of fashion ought to feel more confidence in her own artiste than in any other. But Madame —— is very rapid, my sweet Harriet, and I dare say she will be ready sooner than you would believe possible; besides, you know, the things can follow us. In short, my love, it is quite impossible to delay our appearance on the Marine Parade any longer; instead of a peerage, I may chance to get a lodging in the Tower if we do, for such rebellious disobedience would have something wonderfully like treason in it."

This was said with a sort of dignified playfulness that caused the angry blood to mount to the very temples of his wife; and it was only by a strong effort of resolution that she prevented herself from uttering all the indignant feelings that swelled her heart, as she remembered how this same rapid artiste had been made to decorate her for the purpose of appearing before the eyes of the Prince in the same hateful light in which she still stood before the judgment of her father.

But her determination not to come to extremities with her husband was sufficiently firm, and sufficiently present to her memory, to restrain her; besides, the meditations of a wakeful night had suggested to her another line of conduct less likely to lead to such an open rupture with him as might injure the peace of her family, yet equally effectual in overthrowing the cruelly unjust suspicions to which her past conduct had given rise. Whether there was as much of wisdom as of righteous purpose in this plan, may be doubted. Her mother would probably have shaken her head, and her father would certainly have declared that the end might be obtained by better means.

And well would it have been for poor Harriet had she, at this critical moment of her existence, been blessed by the presence and advice of either. But, unhappily, there was not a single human being to whom she could apply for counsel; and the most that her own unpractised judgment could do for her, was to make her aware that two great dangers were before her, and that her object must be to conduct herself in such a manner as to avoid them both. The first of these was the permitting the Prince Regent himself, or anybody else, to believe that she ever had, or ever could, suppose the notice he had taken of her to have anything in the slightest degree approaching to making love in it; the second, was the being pushed, by her indignation at all that had been done to justify such a belief, into such a quarrel with her husband as might terminate in a separation, disgraceful to herself and to her family.

That both these perils were real and imminent was quite certain, and it was equally so that the task of steering between

them was not likely to prove an easy one. She had begun her watch on the preceding night by solemnly telling herself that, easy or difficult, it must be done, and concluding it by deciding that perhaps the easiest method of bringing herself out of this double danger, would be by beginning with the Regent himself, and convincing him beyond the power of mistake, that the "Pearl of his Duchy" was not a part of his Cornish revenue, and could never again be stitched upon his sleeve, as if belonging to him. Could she once effectually convince his Royal Highness of this truth—and her cheeks tingled as if a hundred eyes were gazing at her, as she remembered how little her past conduct had been calculated to make it apparent to him—she felt very strongly assured that he would no longer distinguish her as he had done; and this blessed result once obtained, her common sense taught her to hope, with a very comfortable degree of confidence, that all the evil reports which had been so generally circulated as to reach even the remote shades of Penmorris, would fade and die away with the cause that produced them. As to the avoiding any such quarrel with her unprincipled husband as might render a separation inevitable, she not only determined to manage it, but by degrees contrived to persuade herself that it would not be very difficult to do so. "Once released from the odious net in which he has so basely entangled me," thought she, "and within the meshes of which I have been exhibited as an object of scorn to the whole world, I shall soon teach myself to endure all the minor evils which my own conceited obstinacy has brought upon me. Should he ever again dare to speak of my family with contumely, I will leave the room, but not the house, and he will learn thereby that there are still some things which I will not bear. This may be useful in more ways than one."

* * * * *

The silence of a minute and a half, which followed Mr. Cuthbert's eulogium on the brilliant rapidity of Madame —, and his merry jest concerning the possible wrath of an offended prince, appeared to him to be longer than was convenient, and he therefore renewed the conversation by saying, but still in the most amiable tone imaginable, "Well, then, my sweet love, tell me when you will be ready?"

Harriet most vehemently longed to answer, "Never!" But the indulging herself in this would have essentially interfered with her plans, both for disenchanting the Regent and keeping on decently good terms with her husband; both, in fact, would have been overthrown by it, and she therefore very discreetly, and rather demurely, answered—

"It is extremely difficult. Mr. Cuthbert, to fix a day and an hour so very suddenly. Ladies require more time for their

preparations than gentlemen, and I dare say the Prince Regent knows this quite as well as I do."

There was something in the tone of this reply which caused the eyes of Mr. Cuthbert to emit a sparkle of pleasure that really had something like brightness in it. He was by no means insensible, however, to the obvious little mixture of rebellion which it contained, but this he heeded not; it sunk into nothing, compared to the immense importance which he attached to the equally obvious little mixture of coquetry which he found appended to it.

Mr. Cuthbert had, fifty times over, compared his own slender and graceful proportions to the corpulency of the Regent, and always with such a degree of delicious self-approbation as to render it morally impossible that he should ever fear his Royal Master as a rival in the affections of his fond young wife. No, he had no such fear; and her familiar allusion to the Prince was uttered exactly in the tone best calculated to please him, for it indicated precisely that sort of feminine wilfulness and pretty 'exigence,' in which he had hitherto found her so lamentably deficient, and which he was quite sure might, if turned to proper account, render the obtaining his peerage an act "easy as lying."

That her words and manner had produced the effect she intended, immediately became evident to the young student in wife-craft.

Yet poor Mrs. Cuthbert, with all her faults, was not naturally addicted to craft of any kind, and might have lived and died without ever attempting or wishing to delude her husband in any way, had she not been driven to it by such hard necessity; but, though I have thought it no more than justice to say thus much in her defence, it may be as well, for the sake of avoiding all critical cavilling on the subject, to confess at once that when a woman does set her wits seriously at work to bamboozle a man—the word, I fear, is a vulgar one, but I really know of no other that accurately expresses my meaning—she generally, unless very lamentably stupid indeed, succeeds in the attempt.

Instead, therefore, of resenting the pretty petulance with which she had answered him, Mr. Cuthbert only smiled, and playfully held up his fore-finger, as if to tell her that she must not be too saucy.

"And when, dearest, do you think you can be ready?" he repeated.

"Oh! I don't know! I am sure I cannot say, to a moment," she replied. "I have fifty things to do before I leave town, and perhaps, the best thing you can do, Mr. Cuthbert, is to go down directly to Brighton, and tell him so."

Him ! As if she had just discovered that there was but one him in the world ! Mr. Cuthbert positively longed to catch her in his arms and kiss her, but he seemed to think that the moment was not quite appropriate for this, and he therefore restrained his rapture, and said, as composedly as he could—

“ Well, my dear, I don’t know but you may be right. If our kind friend has got this peerage in his head, it may be quite as well not to let it slip out again before his Royal word has been formally given ; and I dare say, if you were there, he would be thinking a great deal more of—of a hundred and fifty other things than of getting through the business at once. And it really ought to be done now, without any further delay, for everybody has got hold of it, and nobody seems quite certain whether they ought to address me as ‘ My Lord ’ or not.”

It was with difficulty that his wife suppressed a groan. The phrase, “ everybody has got hold of it,” seemed like the echo of her father’s dreadful letter. Could she ever hope to wipe out the hateful stain that had already attached itself to her name ?

Alone, unaided by the advice of any single being who loved and cared for her ; ignorant, frightened, bewildered, yet called upon to play the most difficult part in the most difficult drama in which it was well possible for a woman to appear, her heart sunk within her, and for a moment she felt that the task she had meditated was too mighty for her strength, and that the only release she could reasonably hope for must be found in death.

She had never fainted in her life : but the indescribable sensation which precedes this death-like suspension of the faculties now seized upon her. She had felt something very like it when making her escape from her husband, after his outrageous attack upon her family upon hearing of the marriage of Mary and Godfrey Marshdale ; and remembering that it had passed off as she hurried up the stairs to her own room, she started from her chair, in order to seek the same relief now.

She had been sitting with her back towards the door, so that when she turned herself towards it, the pallid cheeks and lips, which might have betrayed her condition, were concealed from him ; and, fully believing that this sudden exit was another display of the sort of saucy triumph which the last and most decided proof of her royal admirer’s devotion had occasioned, he gaily exclaimed, as she approached the door, “ Very well, Lady Corwyn—very well ! I shall certainly obey your ladyship’s orders, and post to Brighton without an hour’s delay, to inform the illustrious personage, who shall be nameless, that the most peerless of pearls and of peeresses is about to follow me.”

A bucket of cold water, or a Graffenberg douche itself, could not more effectually have chased every sensation resembling faintness than did these hateful words. They seemed to contain within themselves the essential essence of her husband's character, and its unprincipled baseness and pitiful ambition roused a degree of indignation within her that chased all weakness, and enabled her to reach her room with a spirit roused to such a consciousness of superiority over the pitiful sycophant who conceived himself to be her master, that every nerve was braced to the task of saving herself, by her own unassisted power, from all the dangers that encompassed her.

In about two hours afterwards, she received a message from him, desiring to know if she had any commission to give before he set off for Brighton.

"None!" was her succinct reply; but it was considerably improved by a little flourish from Mrs. Selby in the delivery of it; so much so, indeed, as to elicit from her master another very civil message.

"I would not break in upon her for the world if she is busy, Mrs. Selby; but I must beg her to tell me on what day I may expect her at Brighton," said he, in the most condescending tone imaginable.

"Tell her, my good girl," he added, "that if she can fix the time of her coming, I shall set off immediately, and will take care that the best apartments at the hotel are got ready for her, in case she should arrive before a house is prepared. But if she cannot fix the time for her coming, I think it will be better for me to wait for her, because I should not exactly know—but just tell her what I have said, that will do; I dare say she will understand all about it."

This message, more accurately delivered than the one which had preceded it, was, as Mr. Cuthbert predicted, perfectly well understood by his lady. Had the refusing to go to Brighton made part of her project, she might have been sorely tempted, poor thing, to have given it up altogether by hearing that Mr. Cuthbert's departure depended upon her fixing the time of her own; but, fortunately, this was not the case; and, therefore, it was not only with a contented spirit, but with a safe conscience likewise, that she fixed her own departure at the distance of a week.

Mr. Cuthbert neither expressed, nor felt, any displeasure at this delay. He even forgot the vexatious prolongation of his palsied cousin's life, in the fulness of his content at the present aspect of his affairs at Brighton. What was the loss, or the gain, of a paltry two thousand a-year, compared to the luxury of a coronet, and the delicious harmony of the words, "My lord," when addressed to himself? So Mr. Cuthbert set off

for Brighton, and Mrs. Cuthbert once again enjoyed the happiness of finding herself alone in her drawing-room as well as her dressing-room ; and, spite of all the sorrow and anxiety which oppressed her, she felt that this was a happiness. She was still young enough very keenly to enjoy relief from present annoyance, even though a deep, deep sorrow had so recently fallen upon her, and though the future was so darkly enveloped in doubt and uncertainty. So painfully oppressive, indeed, had the society of her despicable husband become to her, that the knowing she was to pass a whole week without it made her look at her very gravest sorrows with a hopeful eye. She looked forward, with a glow at her heart which felt like certainty, to the time when her dear father would be convinced of her perfect innocence, and herself taken beyond the reach of the hated Prince for ever.

Her note-book recorded an engagement for the evening ; but she could not persuade herself to keep it ; for, would it not be a pity to waste one of her dear, precious evenings upon a party ? So she wrote a note of apology for her intended absence, and set herself very diligently to water the flowers in her balcony, and then to the more elaborate task of washing each separate leaf, a very delicate operation, which must be performed as a labour of love, or not performed at all—as she had long ago discovered, from the lamentable failures of sundry hands which she had employed upon it ; some leaving her only a dozen of leaves, where, perhaps, there ought to have been a score ; another causing the premature fall of a blossom ; and a third leaving the under side of each leaf entirely neglected, so that, as she sat gazing at her costly miniature garden, the painful tint, known by the graphic name of ‘ London smut,’ would often obtrude itself upon her eye, notwithstanding all that had been done to prevent it.

While she was thus employed, her thoughts turned, naturally enough, to her unwhilst garden at Penmorris, and from that to the dear lost companion whose bright face used to peep at her from under a shapeless straw-bonnet, as they diligently laboured in their rival parterres ; and the courted, flattered, rich, and beautiful woman of fashion wept, as she deliberately weighed the value of what she had lost, against the value of what she had gained.

This sort of meditation was not favourable to the occupation she was upon. Her work seemed a type of the change in her condition ; the flowers in her balcony had cost more pounds sterling than her garden at Penmorris had ever cost her pence ; and there was no dirty work to be done there, in order to make them look the brighter ! She turned away from her delicate exotic pets almost with a feeling of disgust, and seated herself

at some distance from the window, in a frame of mind that seemed likely to settle itself into a fit of moody melancholy.

"Oh! this is sin and folly!" she exclaimed, as she felt tears again streaming from her eyes. "It is not thus that I must do battle with the misery I have brought upon myself. If my hopeful spirit fails me I am lost!"

She looked at her watch, and found that it still wanted two hours of the time at which she always drove out, in some direction or other, either to pay visits or make purchases; or, when her youthful energy was sufficiently on the alert to overcome her rapidly-increasing indifference to all things, to get as nearly beyond the reach of London smoke as time would allow, and, leaving her carriage, to wander for half an hour or so among the most rural-looking fields and lanes that she could find.

She felt well enough inclined for this last-named occupation to-day; and she enjoyed the idea of it the more, from remembering that if tempted to wander so long as to return rather too late for dressing, there would be nobody to look solemnly at her, and to hope that her return had not been delayed either by illness or accident.

But what should she do with the two hours which must elapse before she could set out upon this exhibition? She turned her eyes rather languidly towards the table upon which lay the books of the hour which were in the course of being read, and remembered that there was among them a still unopened novel. But *Waverley* was not yet born, though he had been christened some years before, and, therefore, the novel of the day was not quite so sure a remedy for 'ennui' as it became afterwards; so Mrs. Cuthbert, after turning over the pages very languidly for about ten minutes, replaced the volume upon the top of its two brothers, and seated herself in a deep arm-chair, where, with closed eyes and clasped hands, she remained in deep meditation for ten minutes more.

"I will write to her!" she exclaimed, suddenly starting up, and placing herself before her beautiful little writing-table—"I will write to her, not about my own wretched condition, but of her own dear, happy self!" And for a few gay lines she scribbled on, identifying herself so completely with the dear sister she addressed, that as gay and animated a smile settled on her fair face as if she were herself a happy wife.

But ere she had written half a page she stopped; for the bitter thought arose, that if her father saw the letter (and would he not be sure to see it?) he would be shocked to find, that one lying under the dreadful imputations which had been brought against her, could write so gaily. Nay, might not Mary herself, and her dear mother, and her husband, and her

husband's family, have all by this time heard the same hateful slander which had caused her father so much misery, and which, false as it essentially was, she had as yet no power of disproving?

She laid her pen aside, and tore her letter into fragments. A less guilty, or a more unhappy young wife than Mrs. Cuthbert was at that moment, could not easily have been found; and yet a tolerably large proportion of woman-kind, if they could have peeped in upon her beautiful boudoir, looking the very epitome of wealth and elegance, would have found it difficult to sympathize with her in the estimate she took of her own condition. Neither is it quite certain, that they would all of them have agreed in thinking that her husband's vehement desire to make her a peeress deserved all the detestation she bestowed upon it.

A very melancholy half hour followed her abandonment of her letter-writing, for during the course of it she remembered, that in the plan she had decided upon for relieving herself of her royal admirer's gallant attentions, she was acting in opposition to her father's counsels, which dictated her withdrawing herself from the court altogether. She remembered this, and her heart reproached her with renewed disobedience to a father whose advice, if she had dutifully followed it, would have saved her from all the misery from which she was now suffering.

But these thoughts only harassed, without benefiting her position; for the line of conduct suggested by her father could, she thought, only have been adopted by her, with the determination of withdrawing herself altogether from her husband's protection; an act which could not fail of being considered by the world in general as the strongest possible confirmation of all the evil reports which had been circulated against her. It was this conviction, recurred to, examined, again and again, and acknowledged to be incontrovertible, which at length relieved her from the miserable sensation of doubting, whether even her own pure, conscientious purposes were right or wrong.

Whether the course she had determined to pursue had most peril or most safety in it, she hardly knew, but at any rate she felt very fully convinced that it was the only one that was left her, save the dreadful alternative of at once withdrawing herself from the protection of her husband.

Yes; it certainly was a relief to have once again firmly made up her mind as to what she intended; but it was a relief that brought no lightness of heart with it. The object she had in view, had a clear, steady—nay, a holy light about it, which made it very distinctly visible, but it seemed to be a crooked, slippery sort of path that led to it. "There is nothing else—nothing else!" murmured poor Harriet, "I must go into the

midst of it all again ; and yet, Heaven is my witness, that I hate it more than I ever thought, in my very vainest days, that I should like it. Oh, what would I not give, if I could only talk to my own dear mother and Mary for one short hour !” And again the tears flowed as she remembered how utterly futile was the wish !

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This long detail respecting the feelings of Mrs. Cuthbert, when left to the enjoyment of the indulgence she now best loved—namely, the solitude of her dressing-room—has been given for the purpose of doing her justice, for she is about to enter upon a career of very doubtful wisdom, which nothing can excuse but the purity of her intentions, and the absolute impossibility of her turning to any one near her for advice.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

By the time Mrs. Cuthbert had finished washing her eyes for the third time on the morning which she had intended should be such a particularly happy one, the bell that announced the arrival of her carriage was heard, and Selby entered at the same moment with an elegant bonnet in one hand, and a rich shawl in the other. Mrs. Cuthbert only said, “Is the carriage come, Selby !” and then submitted, in total silence, to the process of preparing for it.

“Will you have the luncheon brought here, ma’am ?” demanded the waiting maid ; “it is laid in the dining-room as usual, ma’am ; but I looked in as I came by, and I see you have not touched it.”

“I forgot all about it, Selby,” replied her mistress.

The maid looked at her, and saw she had been weeping.

Mrs. Cuthbert, somehow or other, never could contrive to weep without Selby’s finding it out.

“What’s in the wind now ?” said the intelligent abigail to the upper housemaid, who entered the boudoir as usual, for a little gossip as soon as the carriage drove off ; “she seemed to enjoy herself famously with her books, and her drives, and her visits, the last time the old gentleman took himself off. It was quite impossible not to see, that it was a downright treat to her ; but now her eyes are as red as a ferret’s—and who shall say why, I wonder ?”

“I do think it is very odd, Mrs. Selby, that you have never contrived to find it out all this time ; but tell me, if you can, if there ever was any real high-flying lady like ours, as beautiful

as an angel, and with a husband as old as Adam, who had not got some sort of a lover to comfort her?"

Mrs. Selby made an odd little wriggling movement with her head, looked mysterious, wiped her mistress's pen, and replaced it, but said nothing.

"I suppose you would think it treason to say anything about his Royal Highness, but you are quite mistaken if you fancy we don't hear all about it in the servants' hall," said the housemaid. "It is easy enough to understand all that sort of thing, without the help of any lady's maid in the world. But to tell you the honest truth, Mrs. Selby, nobody in the 'versal earth shall make me believe that a beautiful young lady, like our missis, with one old man for her husband, would choose another old man for her lover, unless she liked his grandeur or his riches a deal too well to cry when she is sitting all alone by her own self, a-thinking of him; and you know as well as I do that it is not twice, nor thrice neither, that would count the times that I, and you too, have caught her a-crying in this very room, when we have come upon her unawares."

"I am not going to deny it, Sarah," returned Selby; "and that for the good reason that I can't. You are very wrong, though, if you watch her, on purpose like, to find it out, and more wrong still, if you tell anybody else of it. And what put it into your head, I should like to know, to talk about her crying, now?"

"Just because I happen to know that she 'has' been crying, that's all," replied Sarah.

"And how did you find it out, I should like to know?" returned the other.

"Not by witchcraft, Mrs. Selby," replied the housemaid; "and I wish I had," she added, with a touch of feeling; "for then I might have some doubt about it, seeing as I don't altogether believe in witches. But no such thing. I found it out by looking in her beautiful face, as I met her plump upon the stairs—she coming down, and I going up; and though I never can, and never will, like any young woman that gives herself, as she has done, to an old husband—old enough, I do believe, to be her grandfather—yet still one can't look at her pretty eyes, all swelled and red with crying, without feeling sorry. And, besides, I am quite certain sure that she is not crying about having an old husband, for she did not do so when she first come home. And I am as sure, too, as that I stand here, that there 'is' some young lover in the case."

This was a surmise which had so frequently suggested itself to Mrs. Selby also, and that without her ever having been able to discover any clue which might fairly enable her either to reject or accept it, that, though really rather averse than not

to making the secret affairs of her lady (for the time being) the theme of discussion with any individual of the family under the rank of a housekeeper, she could not resist the temptation now offered her ; and before many minutes had elapsed, the two women were sitting, side by side, on poor Harriet's chaiselounge, discussing the improbability, not to say impossibility, that any lady, so young, beautiful, and rich, as their mistress, should be so often found in tears—when it was quite certain her husband had not been in the way to scold her, unless she had a lover.

Neither of the young women had the slightest feeling of malice or ill-will against their unfortunate mistress—nay, Selly certainly felt considerable affection for her ; yet nevertheless, by the eloquent pleading of both the damsels in favour of the broad doctrine of probabilities, they did not part till they had convinced each other that a lover, and that a young lover, was in the case ; and that all that people said about the Prince Regent only made it more probable, instead of less so.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cuthbert was unsuspectingly taking her drive, little imagining the wild work that her handmaidens were making with her already blighted character. But she did not set off immediately, as she had at first intended, for the brown heath of Hampstead, or the green lanes of Finchley. It occurred to her, while descending the stairs, that she had never yet discovered what it was that Charles Marshdale had written which had brought him into such sudden and such great celebrity. Something of the sort, it was quite clear, he must have done, and she therefore determined to drive to Hookham's (there was a Hookham's even in those remote days,) for the purpose of getting the volume, or volumes, if possible, and of taking them into the country with her.

The chief impediment to the gratification of this very natural wish was, that she knew not what to ask for, and the carriage had already stopped at the shop door before she had decided as to how she should explain herself, so as to have the key to this rustic celebrity put into her hands. Her servant asked her if he should desire one of the persons in the shop to come to her.

"No," she replied ; "I will get out." The step was dropped at her command, and she entered the shop.

"Pray, sir, have you any of the works of Mr. Charles Marshdale ?" said she.

The man smiled, but replied, very respectfully, "We have nothing published under that name, ma'am, as yet ; but I dare say we shall, very soon. The poems which have obtained that gentleman such great celebrity were published under the name of Charles Martin, but we have not a copy of them at home."

Mrs. Cuthbert thanked him for his information, returned to her carriage, and desired to be driven to a bookseller's; and to the person who there came to receive her commands, she expressed her wish to purchase everything that had been published under the name of Charles Martin.

It required not many minutes to comply with this request, for the article was ready at hand, and the shopman speedily returned, bearing a very slender package, which was as speedily paid for, and the carriage ordered to drive to Finchley.

It was with a very warm and kindly feeling that Mrs. Cuthbert set about untying the little packet, and there was a smile, half saucy, half affectionate, on her countenance as she prepared to make acquaintance with the poetic effusions of her early playfellow. While unfastening a knot into which her impatience had pulled the string that secured the little packet, she meditated upon the strange chance which had given such unexpected celebrity to the name which her sister had taken.

"It certainly is the very strangest thing that ever happened!" thought she; "and of all the boys I ever saw in my life, I think he was the very last I should have fixed upon as likely to become a famous poet—he was always so abominably lazy!"

And here the obstinate string received an impatient little jerk, which might have helped to illustrate the sort of petulant vivacity which had often made the meditative Charles Marshdale seem indolent and lazy to his impetuous playfellow, Harriet Hartwell.

But the string resisted.

"How provoking!" muttered Mrs. Cuthbert. "And I have no scissors in my pocket! Charles Marshdale, of all the people in the world! Mercy on me! It seems impossible! How he used to lie stretched at lazy length upon the top of the hill, behind his father's house, looking for hours together upon the sea that was in the distance, as if he had never seen it before! The only piece of hard work that I ever saw him perform in my life was the cutting some boughs away with his own hand, because they hid a mass of rock that he wanted to look at. If he had turned himself into a landscape-painter I should not so much have wondered; but a poet!—a famous author! It seems impossible! I never saw such a knot as this in my life! I cannot conceive how he ever found time to read verses enough to give himself a notion how to make them. I do not remember to have seen him often lying about with a book in his hand, and yet it was I who was always employed to go and make Charles come, whenever he was wanted, to join in our frolics. Poor Charles! he never refused to come when I was sent for him. How often have I heard him say, with his great

dark eyes fixed on my face, 'Do you want me, Harriet?' And when I answered yes, how suddenly was the movement with which he obeyed me! Poor fellow! If I had ever found out he was a poet, who knows what might have been the consequence?"

This last thought brought no very profound feeling with it; nay, it seemed to arise jestingly, as she continued her ineffectual efforts to loosen the string which enveloped the parcel.

By this time she had reached the turnpike, and she took advantage of the stopping of the carriage to ask the servants if they could lend her a knife. The business was done in a moment, and the opened parcel returned to her. The carriage drove on at the same moment, but its smooth, steady movement was no impediment to the studies she was about to commence.

The little packet contained two small volumes, of about three hundred pages each, and Mrs. Cuthbert smiled as she again remembered the idle habits of her old friend's boyhood.

"At any rate," thought she, "he has achieved his greatness with as little labour as was well possible."

And then she began to examine the contents of the volume she held.

Her colour rose, her heart beat, she trembled from head to foot.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed, aloud; "Charles Marshdale—my playfellow—my early friend! the once almost loved Charles Marshdale! Can he be the author of the only verses that ever yet made me really understand, feel, know, what poetry was, and what its powers might be?"

It would not be very easy to describe intelligibly the state of mind into which this most unexpected discovery had thrown her. She could not have told, herself, whether it gave her pain or pleasure. In reading the first volume of these poems, which had been published singly, she had experienced a species of delight, as new to her as it was exquisite. It came upon her at a time when she was becoming so familiar with painful sensations, as to render any other not only doubly welcome, but doubly acute. The mind of poor Harriet was as pure as her excellent parents deserved that it should be, and had she, when she first read Charles Marshdale's beautiful verses, been aware that she was personally acquainted with their author, she would never have permitted her imagination to kindle into such adoring admiration of his thoughts and feelings as she had done.

But she had thought of the author as she had thought of his

works ; they were so mixed up together as to be one and the same ; and her admiration of both was of that exalted and purely intellectual kind, which a fine thought might elicit, if met with in an unknown page, torn from the volume of which it had made a part.

But now her cheeks burned as she remembered all the ecstasy of sympathy with which she had read the compositions of Charles Marshdale. There was one especially that instantly rushed back upon her remembrance, in which each stanza propounded a question as to the manner in which hopeless but devoted love would show itself to its object. Would it be by avowal ? The answer was, "Never."

Would it be by eternal concealment ? The rhyme replied, "Ever."

Was this, then, the key to all the capricious boy's strange conduct ?—his long silence ?—his desperate avowal at the last ?—It must be so. It was vain, it was false to deny it ; and for one short moment a keen and smarting pang shot through the heart of the unhappy young creature, as she thought how widely different her destiny might have been, had the young poet's love not been—

"All made of passion, all made of wishes,
All adoration, duty, and observance,
All humbleness, all patience."

Had there been mixed with it one little grain of confidence in her, she might now have been his proud and happy wife !

The thought came, and was felt pretty nearly as painfully as a thought could be felt, but it passed with the rapidity of lightning, and was followed by an earnest prayer to Heaven, for forgiveness. The prayer, even as she breathed it, did her essential good ; for it calmed at once the vehement agitation of her spirits.

"I must learn to think of this young man such as he has been, and such as he is, not with the romantic enthusiasm of a silly Harriet Martineau, but with the reasonable approbation of a married woman, who is too sure of her own principles to tremble lest they should be overturned by the first pretty sonnet she reads. It was from a too humble-minded mis-doubting of myself that I took the tremendous step which has wrecked all my earthly happiness. Had I not believed myself so immeasurably lower in the scale of human beings than Mr. Cuthbert, I should never have committed the folly and the sin of becoming his wife. I will not fall into the same error again. I feel that I am not the silly, ignorant, pretty idiot which he taught me to consider myself. Thank Heaven ! I know both myself and him better now !"

It was thus she meditated upon her past and present condi-

tion ; but essentially right as was the conclusion she came to when weighing her own moral worth against that of her contemptible husband, this conclusion was not without danger for one so young, and utterly inexperienced, as herself. She seemed to think that if she joined to her earnest wish of doing right, such a degree of self-confidence as should prevent her living under the paralyzing fear of doing wrong, she could not fail of passing through all the perils in safety. Happy, she did not hope to be. She knew only too well that her own wilful act and deed had rendered this impossible ; but, worthless and degraded she was firmly resolved she never would be ; and most pure was the sincerity with which she thanked God for teaching her to feel that any and every misery that flesh is heir to, is preferable to the misery of conscious guilt.

Not the very sternest moralist, had he read her young heart at that moment, could have blamed any feeling that he found there ; but a man of the world, had the same privilege been given him, might have shaken his head, and told her that it might be safer to avoid danger, than to trust to her own power of rendering it harmless. Joseph Surface consoled with Lady Teazle upon her plethora of reputation. He might have consoled with Mrs. Cuthbert on her plethora of innocence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HAD Mrs. Cuthbert, in the frame of mind that has been described, permitted herself to avoid any public amusement, or any private party, from the fear of meeting Charles Marshdale, she would have thought herself on the very brink of perdition, and positively have shuddered as the idea of such a criminal degree of weakness crossed her mind—nay, so powerful was the operation of this idea upon her spirits, that, before she returned to the house, she determined to keep the engagement she had determined to break in the morning, lest by chance Charles Marshdale might be there, and hearing her absence alluded to, might suppose that she avoided him—an imputation from which she would have shrunk with the most sensitive alarm.

As to her unexpectedly making her appearance, after having sent an apology, it troubled her not. She knew that she should be welcome, and that her giving such a proof of her wishing to be there, if possible, would be considered as an especial compliment.

Nor did she at all deceive herself in this ; her great beauty, brought into first-rate fashionable celebrity by the scarcely-whispered gossipings of the gay set among whom she lived, rendered her a very coveted guest everywhere ; and her being very strongly suspected of having lost her claim to public respect, certainly increased considerably the share accorded her of fashionable admiration.

Mr. Charles Marshdale, however, was not of the party ; and the pathetic manner in which his absence was deplored by the mistress of the house, clearly proved to Harriet that what she had witnessed a few days before at the Opera House, was but a fair specimen of the feelings of the fashionable world respecting him. No sooner, indeed, was his name mentioned, than nearly all the persons within hearing began, in various ways, to exhibit their enthusiastic admiration.

"No ; we have never had anything like it before," said one. "His appearance will henceforth and for ever form an epoch in the history of poetry."

"Unquestionably !" exclaimed a second. "It is a new genus of genius. He stands alone and apart from all that is and from all that has been."

"Gracious heaven ! what language !" cried a lady.

"What matchless vigour of thought !" cried a gentleman. "

"I am told that a title has been already offered him, but that he has refused it," half whispered an individual supposed to be particularly well informed in all such matters.

"There is no man living who has a finer taste for poetry than the regent," said a gentleman, addressing the last speaker, who, he thought, would be extremely likely to repeat what he said to the royal ear ; and then, raising his voice, he added, with half a glance towards Mrs. Outhbert, "The court of the Prince Regent of England is, and must be, one of the most brilliant—may I not safely say the most brilliant—upon earth ? Really genuine talent, and real, genuine beauty, are alone allowed to hold rank in this favourite resort of the Muses and the Graces."

Mrs. Outhbert was already pretty well accustomed to hear the most extravagant praises lavished on the Regent, it having been ever and always a received axiom among courtiers, never to miss an opportunity of praising the sovereign in the hearing of those who are supposed to be on particularly good terms with him ; but a child of a year old could not have been more unconscious of the motive which had so often made her the recipient of the vast mass of loyal eulogium which she had listened to, than she had hitherto been. But since her father's letter, the case was altered ; and so hateful was the strain in which these people now talked to her, that nothing could have

enabled her to endure it but her steadfast faith in her own power of turning the tide of idle scandal aside, by means of the gay prince himself.

As to all the vehement enthusiasm lavished on the name of the fashionable young poet, she rejoiced at it in every way, for it would, doubtless, open for her old friend and new relation an easy path to fortune; and it moreover made her feel perfectly at ease in her conscience as to her own almost passionate admiration for all he had written, for why should she fear to indulge a feeling that was shared by so many?

Nevertheless, she felt, when she awoke on the following morning, as if some new and strange event had happened to her. That the thoughts with which for many weeks past she had been making herself familiar, as those of a being who, though unknown, had more of sympathy with her than any one whom it had ever yet been her lot to meet—that these thoughts should be the thoughts of Charles Marshdale, was a fact so strange, so unexpected, so deeply interesting in every way, that she could not dwell upon it with all the self-possession and composure that she wished.

"But it is great folly to frighten myself because this strange news has startled me," thought she; "when the novelty goes, the wonder will go too. 'Use lessens marvel,' says another great modern poet, and I shall soon get used to contemplate these precious volumes as the production of my old friend, and of my own dear Mary's brother." But this day was not doomed to pass without bringing with it another circumstance likely enough to chase, for a time, at least, every other from the thoughts of Mrs. Cuthbert. It brought a letter from her mother, written in a strain of unchanged confidence and affection, and in evident and utter ignorance of the dreadful reports which had reached her father.

This letter contained the petition for a little pecuniary aid, which it may be remembered Mrs. Hartwell had determined to address to her little Harry, in behalf of the kind, but imprudent old lady, who had been getting herself into trouble for the sake of embellishing a future home of Mrs. Godfrey Marshdale.

It was long—oh, very long since Mrs. Cuthbert had experienced so lively a sensation of pleasure as was awakened by the perusal of this dear letter. Her mother had predicted that it would be so, and she was quite right. "Send her money!" exclaimed she, almost laughing aloud. "Send them all money!—Will I not give them every farthing I have got? What a darling old soul must that Mrs. Montagu be! I know the place where the house is to be, exactly. I remember that

Charles ——— oh, I can perfectly well guess what an improvement the plate-glass windows must be!"

These words, half muttered, half meditated, occupied the time required for searching for her bag, in order to get the key of her little money-drawer.

"Heaven knows whether I have much or little here," thought she, as she prepared to open it; but this is the middle of the month, and I know that I have a right to draw for a hundred pounds on the first—that was settled last pay-day. Now then, let us see!"

The contents of the money-drawer were then turned out and examined, and certainly fell rather short of the careless Harriet's expectations. This error, however, was not a fatal one; there were still twenty-five pounds in the drawer, which, added to the hundred now due to her, would be fully enough, she thought, to pay everything she owed, and leave her enough to spare, and rather more than her mother asked for, without any danger of her being distressed for want of it.

In fact, she remembered no bills, whatever, that could amount to above ten or twelve pounds. She believed that she owed a few pounds to her shoemaker, and there must certainly be a very heavy bill at the milliner's for the costumes of her fancy ball. She shuddered as she thought of it! Not on account of the bill—that, of course, Mr. Cuthbert had undertaken to pay—but at the recollection of the meaning and intention of those hateful costumes themselves.

She was too happy, however, at that moment to dwell long upon a theme so sure to make her sad, and instantly withdrew her thoughts from it, to fix them on the delightful business she had in hand.

It must be a hundred pounds that she would send, and she would beg that the small surplus (her mother had named eighty) should be expended in a little writing-table for Mary. And then she took her new check-book, the first leaf of which had been filled up by her attentive husband, as a model for her, requiring only her signature to a faithful copy of it, in order to make the said copy worth one hundred pounds sterling. On the blank cover of the check-book was written, in the same clear characters, a memorandum, signifying that on every 28th of July, and every 28th of February, the sum of one hundred pounds would be found ready at the banking-house of Messrs. Drummond, to honour any checks of Harriet Cuthbert, not exceeding that amount.

This was the first time Harriet had found herself called to the dignified office of drawing a check, as it was only on the preceding February that, when paying his lady her handsome

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stipulated allowance for pin-money, it had occurred to Mr. Cuthbert that permitting her to do so, would be carrying out his generous intentions in a far better style in the eyes of his banker, than if he drew himself, and paid her the amount in private.

And the check was drawn without blunder or blemish of any kind, and immediately given to the butler, who was the confidential agent always employed on such occasions, with orders to bring her the amount in a bank bill of the same value as the check.

This done, the happy lady sat down, and indulged herself by letting her imagination wander away to Penmorris, and its dear Vicarage; and she saw the dear confiding faces of her mother and Mary, as they would look when in the act of opening her letter, almost as distinctly as if they had been actually before her.

And how would her father look if he came in? The question fell like ice upon her heart, and, for a moment or two, she was as miserable as she had before been happy. But was it indeed possible that the perfect confidence which she so well knew had ever existed between her father and mother—was it indeed possible, that this could be so completely destroyed, or even suspended between them, as to make it practicable for her mother to write such a letter as she had just received, if her father's heart was still filled with indignation against her? Might not her letter have produced a good effect on him? Might he not have made further inquiries, and found reason to believe that he had judged her too harshly? Perhaps the next letter would be from himself, and he would tell her so.

Innocence and youth are always sanguine; and a very few minutes sufficed to convince the greatly-mistaken Harriet that everything at Penmorris would and must go on rightly, for how could such a heart as her father's blunder long about the principles or feelings of the child he had himself reared and educated? And then she read her dear mother's precious letter again, and every hope was strengthened, and every fear hushed.

She often told herself, that she could never be a happy woman; but then her conscience as often added, that she did not deserve to be so, because she had been wilful when she ought to have been obedient. But she had been so used to this sort of meditation now, that it had become as familiar, and was borne as patiently, as the resolute grimaces which so constantly returned, in defiance of all her washing, upon her flowers. Indeed she bore it better, for her spirits under it were sustained by a very honest and resolute determination,

that though unhappy, she would not be wicked ; and that let baseness or seduction assail her in what shape they might, she would neither be sullied by the one nor yield to the other, though she should forfeit her life to avoid it.

A certain degree of difficulty is, perhaps, necessary, to call forth energy of character to its fullest extent. Mrs. Cuthbert was quite aware that she had difficulties before her, and that some of them would probably meet her in the campaign she was about to enter upon at Brighton ; but the thought of this rather braced her nerves than shook them.

"So be it," she said, "and the sooner it begins the better. However weak I am, or have been, I am too good to become a victim to the preposterous vanity of my husband, or of his Regent either."

She was still waiting for the return of the messenger she had sent to the bank, in order to inclose the bank note, and seal her letter to her mother.

That happy letter had been long ago written, having been poured forth with irresistible rapidity within half an hour after she had received the precious dispatch to which it was an answer.

While still waiting for her enclosure, her thoughts wandered to sundry trifling things which it was her purpose to do, and to order, before she left town. Among these were, the paying her shoemaker, and also the inquiring at her glover's, whether her last six dozen of white gloves had been paid for, a point upon which she felt uncertain. And while thus financially employed, it occurred to her, that it would be better to ask her milliner, before she left London for the season, whether her ball dresses had been already paid (she knew that no other dresses were unpaid), and to make her understand, that if they were not, she was to send her bill for them to Mr. Cuthbert. She remembered also, that she had a bonnet or two not yet paid for ; but she flattered herself that the money in her drawer would be more than enough for all this, and determined not to delay, beyond the following morning, the calling on Madame —— and the two other tradespeople, for the purpose of settling their accounts.

This evening she passed at home, and spent it in reading that volume of her old friend's compositions which she had not before perused. No fears of admiring them too much, or of liking their author too well, arose within her, to lessen the extreme pleasure which this occupation afforded her. To a heart so innocent and so upright as that of Mrs. Cuthbert, such fears do not readily suggest themselves, and had any outward voice given utterance to them, she would have resented it with very honest anger, as a most cruel and unjust sus-

picion. She was a married woman ; and, having neither the hope nor the fear of forgetting this fact, no feelings that were inconsistent with it ever crossed her imagination as being possible. She certainly was the happier for knowing that Charles Marshdale was the author of the little volumes which had obtained such brilliant success ; she felt that his near relationship to Godfrey did much towards redeeming whatever had been objectionable in the marriage of her sister ; and she dwelt with considerable pleasure upon the idea, that if her proud husband should again speak of her new relative as Farmer Marshdale, she might indulge herself by saying rather distinctly, in a parenthesis, "and celebrated Charles Marshdale's brother."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

At her usual hour of driving out, Mrs. Cuthbert ordered her carriage first to her glover's, then to her shoemaker's, and then to the well-known and highly-fashionable residence of Madame ——. At the first she had the satisfaction of learning, that she had no bill at all ; and though at the second she found she had to pay seven pounds instead of four, as she had computed it, she went on very fearlessly to the milliner's, with her eighteen pounds in her purse, feeling quite certain that it must be a great deal more than she owed there, and only anxious that she should not for an instant forget the important fact, that nothing was to be purchased or ordered there, let the temptation be what it might.

On mounting to the drawing-room floor, the mistress of the establishment herself came forward to receive her ; and did so, if possible, with even more than her usual degree of blandishment and respect. "What might she have the honour and happiness of showing madam ?"

"Nothing, just now," replied Mrs. Cuthbert, with a smile. "I am only come to pay my bill, Madame ——."

"Indeed, Madam Cuthbert, it is very kind of you to think of me, before you leave town !" replied the delighted Frenchwoman ; "I only wish that some of my elder customers were equally kind and thoughtful ; but I have furnished dresses this season to many and many, who have gone away, at least for the present time, without paying for them, and I have very heavy bills coming due against me, from Paris."

As this was said with more than gravity, for Madame —'s handsome eyes were actually full of tears as she spoke, Mrs.

Cuthbert answered her very kindly, saying she must not alarm herself too soon, and telling her that she might be very sure it was impossible for any lady to go away leaving her bill unpaid without intending to send the money back to her.

Madame — sighed, and shook her head in a very desponding style.

“At any rate, Madam Cuthbert,” she said, “your kindness will be a help to me, and will be felt the more, because I want it at this time so very particularly. If madam will excuse me for a moment I will fetch her account.”

And Mrs. Cuthbert was left for a short time alone; if, indeed, any beautiful young woman can be said to be alone when surrounded by the tempting forms of enticing bonnets and bewitching cloaks.

And Mrs. Cuthbert really had considerable pleasure in looking at them all, but chiefly from the comfortable sensation arising from being very sure that she should not be tempted to buy any of them.

Madame — kept her word, she really did return very speedily, and in the most graceful manner possible placed in the hands of Mrs. Cuthbert an account that was not quite so short as she expected, but which was not very long either. However, on casting her eyes, as she had already learned to do, to the last figures inscribed on it, which, though the bouquet of the tradesman, has sometimes more the effect of a coup-de-grace to the customer, she read, to her equal horror and surprise, a row of figures, which stood thus—122*l.* 15*s.* 9*d.*

Harriet was still very young, so she started, and changed colour; but a moment's thought re-assured her. The giving this account to her was evidently a mistake. A second glance showed her that it included, as she might easily have guessed, the two fancy dresses, and that it ought to have been sent to her husband, instead of being given to her. The amount was certainly rather larger than she had expected it would be, but not sufficiently so to deserve any remark, and she therefore only said, “A very small part of this account, Madame —, is what I am come to pay. These two dresses, which amount together, I see, to 112*l.* 1*s.* 6*d.* were a present from my husband, and the bill for them must be sent to him.

It was now Madame —'s turn to colour, which she did considerably beyond the extent of her rouge. “I am extremely sorry, madam, that there should be any mistake here,” she replied civilly, but with great self-possession and firmness of manner; but the mistake is not with me. As Mr. Cuthbert had himself called upon me in the first instance, and had seemed, throughout, to take so much interest about these costumes, I thought as you, madam, that it was probably his in-

tention to pay for them himself, without your being troubled about it at all, and I therefore took the liberty of sending in my account to him about a month ago. 'This, madam,' she added, taking an open letter from an open drawer—"this was his answer."

Mrs. Cuthbert took the letter, and read, in her husband's handwriting, as follows:—

"You are mistaken, madam, in supposing that the bill for Mrs. Cuthbert's dresses at her fancy hall should not be sent in to her, like all her other bills. That lady disposes of her own pin-money exactly in the manner she herself thinks proper. I never interfere with it, in any way. On the occasion in question she wished that I should be responsible as respects good taste, and I consented to be so; but I hold myself responsible in no other way. You need, however, be under no alarm concerning the payment of your account; Mrs. Cuthbert is not a lady who would suffer any of her bills to remain long unpaid, and I have the pleasure of knowing that the pin-money settled upon her at her marriage is fully sufficient to supply her expenses, even though a few fancy dresses from Madame — may make a part of them.

"J. F. A. CUTHBERT."

A pretty strong feeling of indignation swelled the heart of Harriet as she read this letter, and one half moment sufficed to bring back to her recollection her husband's gallant declaration that the dresses he was about to select, should be furnished at his own cost; as well as the motive which had led him thus to display his taste and generosity, and the penalty she had paid, in reputation, for wearing them.

But this was not the first time that Mrs. Cuthbert had been taught to feel the necessity of concealing what was passing in her mind, and of looking placidly composed, when she was both agitated and angry. At this moment, she had not only to bear the discovery of this new instance of her elegant husband's baseness, but to look as if it were a mere mistake, and a matter of no consequence whatever, and, moreover, to take upon herself this burdensome debt, with the appearance of thinking it no burden at all, at the very moment that it was necessary for her to confess that she had no present means whatever of paying it.

She gave herself a few seconds for the recovery of her composure and for inventing the first excuse that had been ever necessary for her in order to evade paying a just debt at the moment it had been demanded; but these few seconds sufficed for both.

"There can be no doubt that the mistake was mine, madam,"

said she ; “ and I am much more sorry for having fallen into it, on account of the temporary inconvenience it may occasion to you, than for the necessity it will put me under of being rather more economical, while I am out of town, than I intended to be ; but the fact is, that at the present moment I really have not the means of paying you, and I am constrained, much against my inclination, to say that you must wait for your money.”

The careless people she had passed her life in adorning, had more to do, perhaps, in producing the manner in which this apology was received, than the natural temper of the poor Frenchwoman ; for she had been so accustomed to hear the same graceful creatures who in the month of March ordered the costly dresses which were to decorate and exhibit their charms, with the air of princesses who had unbounded store of wealth at their command, declare in the month of August that they did not know which way to turn to find a shilling, as to have become sometimes rather restive under it. Nor did the loveliness and air of youthful innocence of the present defaulter at all tend to soften her heart towards her. On the contrary, she felt more than usually provoked, because she was more than usually disappointed.

“ It is quite impossible, madam,” she said—“ that you can really intend to leave London without paying me. My creditors will show no patience to me, and how, therefore, can I be expected to show patience to others ? I trust, madam, you will think better of it !” And then, seeing the real distress expressed in the countenance of her unfortunate customer, she added, “ I feel sure you would, madam, if you knew how very greatly distressed I shall be without the money. I will not believe madam will go into the country without finding some means of paying me ! Ladies of fashion, like you, madam, have so many ways by which it is easy to obtain a little money when they are pressed for it ! Madam could borrow a hundred pounds for asking it, and I could not do it for any interest I could give ! Indeed, indeed, Madam Cuthbert, the not receiving the amount of your bill, which I had quite reckoned upon as certain, may be the cause of sending me to prison before you return to London.”

And while saying this, the eyes of the really embarrassed modiste were again twinkling through tears.

Poor Harriet's young head was so perfectly inexperienced in money difficulties, that she would have felt as able to steer a leaky ship into harbour in a storm, as to assist poor Madame—or herself, in the present emergency. But, while conscious of her ignorance on such matters, her hopeful spirit suggested that there must be ways and means, if she allowed herself a

little leisure to think about it, by which she might convert some of the multitude of costly things in her possession into ready money sufficient to pay this pressing call upon her ; and she therefore ventured to say—"Believe me, Madame ——, I would greatly prefer being inconvenienced myself, to suffering you to be so on my account ; and I will immediately endeavour to find means for settling your claim upon me. Good morning. Depend upon it, that in some way or other you shall hear from me in a day or two, and, I hope, in a manner that will be satisfactory to you."

There was no danger that Madame —— should mistake the sincerity of her young customer. She was too familiar with the expression of fine-lady features in all moods, to make any blunder on the subject ; she therefore returned her thanks for the promised aid, almost as gratefully, poor woman, as if she had been promised a donation instead of a debt ; and Mrs. Cuthbert left her with the very firmest resolution that she should be paid, though in a very disagreeable state of uncertainty as to the way in which she was to find means to pay her.

In this still imperfect world of ours, both men and women are often exposed to a sort of moral strife with their fellow-creatures, which requires considerable moral courage to bring to a safe and laudable issue ; and this courage may be supplied by many sources. An honest consciousness of being in the right, will go far towards it ; yet even this will not always suffice to keep a timid nature firm and steady in the struggle ; but if this consciousness of right be aided by a tolerably strong feeling of contempt towards an adversary, both courage and power, too, increase prodigiously.

And thus it fared with Mrs. Cuthbert. Had her matrimonial repentance been founded on her husband's sternness of character, harshness of manners, or rigid observance of customs and doctrines, of less easy practice than those to which she had been accustomed, Harriet's disposition and principles were of a kind to have converted her by degrees, not into a very happy woman, but into a very uncomplaining slave.

But now the case was wholly different. She scorned her husband a vast deal too much to be afraid of him, and her morning's adventure sent her home not only with a firm purpose of paying Madame ——, from feeling that it was her duty to do so, but with a purpose equally firm, though still more difficult, perhaps, to maintain, of henceforth managing herself and her affairs entirely according to her own judgment, as to what it was right and proper for her to do, without referring to his wishes or opinions in any way.

No wise husband will ever so act as to bring his wife into such

a condition of mind as this; for it converts what is for the most part a tolerably docile sort of companion, into a very troublesome little obstacle to his will.

A woman may be very angry with her husband; she may be jealous of him, she may think him a tyrant, she may think him both stingy and unkind to her—nay, she may even dislike his manners; but not all this put together will have the power to convert her into so desperate a rebel as she is sure to become, if he inspires her with a genuine and hearty feeling of contempt.

I speak not here of such contempt as a trumpery woman of elegant demeanour, conscious of being “*au fait*” of all the petty “convenances” of high-bred society, may feel for an estimable man who is not so; but of that sturdy moral feeling, which has to do with qualities—not forms.

When a contempt of this latter kind is generated in the mind of a wife, there is nothing—no, not a sovereign power over life and death in the husband—which can restore a proper equilibrium to the yoke under which they are doomed to plough through life together. The pace of the female under it does, not, however, become more easy, for it is an unnatural pace. It only becomes less obedient, and more fearless.

And such, unhappily, was likely henceforward to be the pace of poor Harriet.

Her unresisting compliance with her husband's will had tarnished her reputation as a virtuous woman, and thrown an imputation upon her honesty which it was utterly impossible she could repel, without disgracing the name she bore in the person of the man who had given it to her. Should she go on in such a course as this; or should she make the honour and credit of her own family the sacrifice for her avoiding it, by eloping from her husband's house? No!—Mrs. Cuthbert was equally determined to do neither; and it would be difficult to deny that she was right in coming to this determination. But, alas! the path that lay between was thorny and perilous—full of difficulty and full of danger. She had to defy, and, in some sort, to manage, her husband. She had to defy, and, in some sort, to manage, her sovereign. She had to rectify the judgment and stop the slanders of an envious world, and she had to pay a just and lawful debt without in the least degree knowing in what direction she ought to turn in order to find money wherewith to do it. And Mrs. Cuthbert was not yet quite twenty years old!

CHAPTER XL.

"SELBY!" said Mrs. Cuthbert, before the operation of removing her bonnet and shawl was fully completed—"Selby, I find that Madame ——'s bill for those two dresses at the fancy ball amounts to a much larger sum than I have got by me. What can I do about it?"

"Oh dear, ma'am!" replied Selby, unable to repress a smile at the countrified simplicity of her young mistress—"ladies like you never think of troubling themselves about such things as that. Madame —— must wait for her money."

"I beg your pardon, Selby, but you are quite mistaken. I, and all ladies like me, do think of troubling themselves about paying their just debts. I have just seen Madame ——, and she happens to want her money immediately; so I certainly shall not leave town till I have paid it."

Selby's inclination to laugh did not return. Steadiness of purpose will give an air of dignity to a child. "Of course, ma'am, you know best!" she said.

"About the necessity of paying her immediately, perhaps, I do; because I have seen her, and you have not," returned Mrs. Cuthbert; "but as to some mode of immediately obtaining the money, I think it very likely that you may know more than I."

"Why, ma'am, half a line to my master——" began Selby.

"I do not choose to apply to your master upon this occasion," said Mrs. Cuthbert, interrupting her with an air of 'hauteur' and a flushed cheek, that plainly enough spoke a feeling of displeasure.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the waiting-maid, while a whole host of conjectures and suspicions rushed rapidly into her brain.

"There is nothing to beg pardon for, Selby," said her mistress, recovering herself; "but the fact is that, upon this occasion, I do not wish to apply to Mr. Cuthbert for money. Can you think of any mode by which I could borrow a hundred pounds?—No! a hundred guineas—it is just a hundred guineas that I want!"

"I can't indeed, ma'am; that is, borrow, you know, ma'am, without any security."

"Security?" repeated Mrs. Cuthbert. "What do you mean by security, Selby? Of course I should sign a promise of payment, I suppose, or something of that sort."

"Yes, ma'am," returned the privy-councillor; "but, the

only people I know of that can be got at to lend money, always have something real and solid you know, ma'am, given them to keep till such time as the money is paid back again; and then they give back the things, only charging for the interest of the money and the accommodation."

"Well, I dare say you know best, Selby," replied her mistress; "but I really should have thought that it would have been easy enough to find somebody who would take my written word, upon condition of being paid for it, too."

"Yes, ma'am, but that must be among ladies and gentlemen. I believe people whose trade it is to lend money cannot be expected to do quite the same, you know, ma'am."

"No, Selby, I do not know," rejoined her mistress—"I really know nothing about it, except that I want to borrow a hundred guineas, to enable me to pay my dressmaker before I leave town, and that I shall be very ready to pay it back again, with as much more as the people may choose to charge for lending it."

"Then there will be no manner of difficulty, you may be very sure, ma'am; only I shall want you to tell me, if you please, what you would like for me to take by way of a pledge," said Selby.

"By way of what?" returned her ignorant young mistress.

"A pledge, ma'am, if you please. I must take some of your trinkets, I suppose, because anything else would be more cumbersome."

"And if I send some of my trinkets, will they be kept quite safe, and taken great care of, till I pay the money back again?" demanded Mrs. Cuthbert.

Selby assured her that she might make herself perfectly easy on that point, for that no such thing had ever been heard of, as a lady's losing anything that she had put in—"pawn," she would have added, had not a knock at the door interrupted her; and if she had it is probable that the whole transaction would have taken a different shape, for even Harriet had heard of pawning goods, and the phrase would have suggested recollections connected with sundry unfortunate and disreputable personages, whose sins and sorrows had made the theme of much village gossip at Penmorris. Rather than have pawned her trinkets, she would certainly have preferred selling something or other that she might fairly call her own.

As it was, however, she unfortunately fixed upon a little case, easily portable, and, in fact, chosen for that reason only, in preference to any larger one, of which there were many, which would have been less objectionable; for this small portable case contained two splendid diamond stars, which had been newly set, as ornaments for the sleeve, but which made part of the

family diamonds which, as Mr. Cuthbert had stated on a former occasion, were considered as an heir-loom.

No such recollection, no such idea, ever entered her head ; and Selby was therefore sent off, with as little delay as possible, to deposit the jewels, and bring back the cash.

The knock at the door which had occasioned this ill-omened interruption was that of the housemaid, who had been sent by the footman to inform her mistress that there was a gentleman in the drawing-room who desired to speak to her.

"I will come down directly," was her reply ; and having repeated her orders to Selby to lose no time in the execution of the business with which she was entrusted, Mrs. Cuthbert descended to the drawing-room.

She started and coloured violently when she perceived that the gentleman who was waiting for her was no other than the celebrated poet, Charles Marshdale.

The rapidity with which she recovered from this first feeling of embarrassment was no slight proof of Mrs. Cuthbert's power over herself. The discovery which she had so recently made, and the effect which she was conscious it had produced upon her mind, made the first sight of the young man—whose mind had, while unknown, been to her mind what no other had ever been, or was likely to be—a strong trial of her equanimity. And in addition to this, there was another fact, which she was quite conscious of, though she neither dwelt upon nor reasoned much concerning it. This was the vast, the immense difference which she felt there was between her recollections of Charles Marshdale's unexpected avowal of long-concealed love, before she knew him to be the author of the poems which had so enchanted her, and after it.

Very little more than twenty-four hours had passed since the memory of that scene had, as she thought, so nearly passed from her mind altogether, that she might almost have said with truth that she had forgotten it.

It had given her great pain while it lasted, and for that reason, perhaps, she had seldom recurred to it ; moreover, whenever she had accidentally done so, the result had invariably been a strong conviction that he had behaved extremely ill ; and it was only by classing him among the very silliest and most unmeaning of juvenile Corydons, that she had brought herself to think of him with some portion of the kindness with which she thought of every other member of his family.

But all this was much changed by the perusal of the *statuzas* upon "Never," and "Ever."

It was not the consciousness of this change, however, which was likely to lead her to the display of any particularly strong emotion at seeing him ; on the contrary, not a single moment

had elapsed after she had recognised him, before her manner had not only resumed all its usual composure, but she had schooled herself into adding to it exactly such a degree of friendly familiarity and congratulation as was most likely effectually to prevent his feeling any vehement emotion himself.

The character of Mrs. Cuthbert was developing itself very rapidly under the pressure of circumstances which must either rouse her strength to combat them, or else crush her under their weight for ever. She felt that her destiny was not a pleasant, not an easy one; nevertheless, she did not intend that it should overpower her.

But never were the conduct and manners of a well-intentioned woman so completely misunderstood, or so cruelly misconstrued, as were those of Mrs. Cuthbert, by Charles Marshdale. He had been one of those who, at her own house, had witnessed her persevering, her devoted attention to her royal guest; and he had also been one of those who had listened with the deepest attention to the inferences which were drawn from it. He had, too, been wounded to the quick by the light, gay, careless manner in which she had summoned him to her opera-box; for at that very moment his whole soul was filled with the recollection of their last interview, of which she thought no more than of the first which had ever brought them together, and which probably took place when she was a few weeks old.

But, alas! poor Harriet, everything was against her! Had he not known himself to be the idol of lords and ladies for the hour, he might have given her credit for some feeling of natural kindness towards the brother of her sister's husband when she so perseveringly insisted upon his coming to her; but as it was no thought arose to save her from the imputation of wishing to show off, as an intimate acquaintance, the man whom the very noblest of the land were delighting to honour.

From that hour, he had avoided every probable opportunity of meeting her; and he now only stood in her presence because a deeply-honoured friend had imposed upon him the painful, the almost revolting task of watching her conduct. But not even this request, though it came to him from a quarter that he almost held to be sacred, would have brought him at such an hour into her drawing-room had not accident almost irresistibly helped to do it.

Charles Marshdale had found his health failing him at Oxford; his nights were given more to scribbling than to sleeping; and the conscientious labour which he bestowed upon his pupils often left him too languid to execute his more congenial tasks with the vigour and energy which he wished to bestow upon

them. One of the fruits of his great and sudden reputation as a poet was his unexpected election to a very good fellowship ; and this, together with the outrageously liberal offers which he received from more than one fashionable bookseller, induced him to resign his situation as college-tutor, and to set off immediately afterwards to pass a few weeks at Brighton.

The very evening of the day on which Mr. Cuthbert arrived there, he had the supreme honour and happiness of meeting the young poet at the Pavilion ; and some one of his noble patrons having alluded to the necessity of Marshdale's running up to town, on the following morning, to meet his still more important patron the bookseller, the vanity of Mr. Cuthbert prompted him to display his acquaintance with the petted lion by asking him if he would do him the exceeding kindness of conveying a message for him to Mrs. Cuthbert? "I most unfortunately missed the post-hour this afternoon," said he ; "and it was the more unfortunate, because our royal master here,"—pointing to an inner room, in which the Regent was permitting himself to be amused by a more select circle,—“had himself given me a message for Mrs. Cuthbert, which this vexatious mistake of mine has prevented my forwarding to her.”

Young Marshdale was very nearly startled out of everything resembling self-possession by this sudden and most unexpected address. But he remembered the mission he had received from another quarter, and the recollection of it restored him to more composure than anything else could have done. He not only recovered the power of answering what was said to him, which at first was completely taken away, but of answering it in the way that he would have wished to do had the fullest time and opportunity for consideration been afforded him.

“If you will be so obliging, sir, as to make me distinctly understand what you wish to have repeated to Mrs. Cuthbert, I will take great care to deliver it faithfully, if she has the goodness to admit me to her presence.”

This was said very civilly, but with so much formality, as to prove to the proud old courtier, that whatever honour the embassy conferred, was not sought, but thrust upon the ambassador.

In fact, the young poet had not yet been able to discover whether the old gentleman recognised in him a near connection of his wife's family, or whether he did not ; and he was anxious to answer him in a style that might suit either contingency. Mr. Cuthbert was, in truth, still utterly ignorant of the fact ; but this was no longer a matter of importance either to himself or to anybody else. The having met him in the drawing-room of the Regent had, for the time at least, levelled all distinctions ; and, rather than have risked the offending a man so ho-

noured, he would have taken his hat off to every member of his family in succession.

"Well, then, my dear sir," resumed the peer expectant, pleased with the opportunity of still further displaying his intimacy with the most celebrated man in the circle, "if you will come with me for half a moment into the outer room, I will explain everything to you."

Charles made a silent sign that he would follow him; and what his instructions were, may be precisely gathered from what now took place between himself and Mrs. Cuthbert, for never were instructions more faithfully obeyed.

He began by very ceremoniously returning her friendly greeting; for the movement of genuine natural feeling which had, for an instant, while in her opera-box, made him feel like a friend of former days, had lasted but for the short moment during which his eye almost involuntarily rested on her face. And more than once since that time he had frowned at his own weakness as he recalled, in his solitary meditations, the culpable tenderness of his feelings during that short moment. Not from any emotion arising from passion, however, were those feelings culpable, nor did he do himself the wrong of thinking so. Had Harriet, in her melancholy loveliness, appeared before him at that moment as free as air, instead of as a wedded wife, he would have condemned this tenderness as culpable—for it was felt for a being whom he despised.

No such weakness, however, influenced his manner now. Her extended hand appeared not to have been seen, and the only return he made to her smiling and friendly salutation was a bow that might have befitted the attaché to an embassy, in the act of delivering to some prodigious magnate a message from his principal. It was accompanied by a step backwards, which brought him near a chair, and Mrs. Cuthbert, backing also till she reached another chair, they sat down opposite to each other, pretty nearly at as great a distance as the size of the room permitted.

"I wish you very sincerely joy, Charles Marshdale, of your great literary success. How very happy it must have made all our dear friends and relations at Penmorris!" said Mrs. Cuthbert.

"You are very obliging, madam," replied the poet, with the most freezing coldness.

"Upon my word, you must not call me madam, Charles!" said she, really forgetting for a moment everything but the nearness of their recent family connection. "Forget the great Babylon altogether, and Cavendish Square in particular, and let us fancy ourselves talking of the dear inhabitants of Penmorris, amidst the rustic shades of Penmorris itself."

The young poet trembled, but it was from indignation, and not from love.

"Wretched woman!" he mentally exclaimed. "Is she indeed so utterly lost, so thoroughly abandoned, as, in the very height of her intrigue with one man, to throw out her allurements to another? When she was free, and might have returned my devoted love with innocence, she scorned me, for I was humble and unknown; but now, because Fashion has crowned me with her capricious wreath, she turns from her husband on one side, and from her royal lover on the other, in the hope of luring me to her feet again! How little does she know me!"

"I should not have thus ventured to intrude upon you, Mrs. Cuthbert," he replied, without taking the slightest notice of her friendly compliment, "had I not been honoured by Mr. Cuthbert with a message to you, which I have now called to deliver. He requested me to tell you that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent has expressed himself very much disappointed at seeing him arrive alone, and therefore that he—Mr. Cuthbert, I mean—earnestly requests that you will be pleased, if possible, to hasten your departure from London, and join him at Brighton within two days, at latest, of the present time."

The eyes of Marshdale were steadily fixed upon Mrs. Cuthbert as he delivered this message. The chief reason, indeed, for his having so readily consented to be the bearer of it was, that he might watch her narrowly. The public voice, as he had repeatedly told himself, when examining the grounds of his present conduct towards her, was, in such a case as this, fully sufficient to justify the worst suspicions against her. "Nevertheless, she shall be judged with fairness, with more than fairness—she shall be judged with the most patient caution. I will watch her with my own eyes, and listen to her with my own ears, and only by their aid will I condemn her."

Such was his purpose—his honest-meaning purpose. But men, as well as women, are very fallible creatures, and it would be better if they remembered oftener, when they feel their hearts swelling with virtuous indignation against suspected sin, the Divine command, "Judge not."

Charles Marshdale's watchfulness in the present instance brought him nothing but error—error as gross in its injustice as lamentable in its effect.

Mrs. Cuthbert did not immediately reply to his speech, excepting, indeed, that her unfortunate, and often misinterpreted habit of blushing, sent a glow over her face, which he gazed upon as an unmistakable evidence of feelings that she was, or at any rate that she ought to have been, ashamed of.

Had she ventured to speak the moment he had ceased

to do so, she would have said, "You might be better employed, Charles Marshdale, than in bringing such infamous messages to your old friend and playfellow." And if she had, I should have had, perhaps, a very different tale to tell. But Mrs. Cuthbert was growing very cautious. She had a deep game to play, and she felt that her only chance of winning it was to say and do nothing heedlessly. She had no intention, no thought, no hope, of relieving herself in any way from the dreadful thralldom which she had brought upon herself by her miserable marriage. She had never even suffered herself to calculate the chances of relief which the vast differences between her husband's age and her own fairly opened before her. She knew she had deserved the rod, and she submitted to it with a steadfastness of resignation, from which she felt a constant source of consolation, because she was conscious that there was a degree of merit in it, which reconciled her, in some degree, to her offending self.

But though unrepiningly submissive to the misery of being Mr. Cuthbert's wife, which she did deserve, she was vehemently determined not to submit to the still greater misery of being accounted the Regent's mistress, which she did not; and pretty nearly everything she now did or said had some reference to the plan she had devised in order to prevent this.

"Mr. Cuthbert is very kind, and very indulgent," she said, "in wishing to hasten my return to a scene which he knows I enjoy so much. The gaiety and brightness of a court have, I confess, great attractions for me. But as to the venerable Regent himself, I cannot say that I find him very attractive. You say that you were at the Pavilion, the other night, Mr. Marshdale; did you not think the old gentleman a dreadful bore?"

The impetuous poet instantly rose from his chair. He declared to himself, with a genuine pang at his very heart's core, that it was impossible to mistake her meaning. But though he had not been able to escape from the influence of her beauty, when she was innocent, he felt himself armed to the teeth against any danger that her most seductive blandishments could offer now.

"I am too little acquainted with courts and courtiers, Mrs. Cuthbert, to form any decided notions of the value of either. But it may be, perhaps, from a laudable curiosity to study both, that I am in haste to dispatch the business I have to do in London, in order that I may return, without loss of time, to Brighton. Good morning to you, madam."

She bowed to him as she sate, almost as stiffly as he bowed to her, but yet her gentle eye was fixed upon him with a look of vexation, that corresponded well with the evil thoughts that were at work against her, in the head of her old friend. And

so they parted : he muttering, as he descended the stairs, "She is determined to make my task as difficult as possible ;" while she muttered, as she waited impatiently till his step was sufficiently distant to permit her ascending, "I see that he has taken me in aversion ! And no wonder ! What can he think of such a message ? His dislike of me does him honour. The feeling is worthy of him. And in his case it may be just as well that it should be so, I could soon bring myself to be glad of it—very glad. But, Heaven forbid that he should let this message reach my dear, dear father ! I think my letter must have gone far towards convincing him, at least, that the odious slander was untrue : for, could I have written as I did write, had it been otherwise ? But what would he think did he hear this ? When I have attained my object, then he may know everything. Let me but succeed in convincing the Regent himself, that I am not the thing he has been taught to think me, and all will yet be well. If all the hearts at Penmorris (excepting that of poor Charles) do but love me still, I do not believe it would be in the power of all the husbands, or all the regents in the world, to make me really unhappy. But the sooner I accomplish my task the better ; so I shall obey the virtuous mandate of my exemplary husband, and hasten down to Brighton, with the least possible delay. My little dressing-room will be a still more precious retreat afterwards than it is now."

Mrs. Cuthbert gave the necessary orders to her servants, accordingly : the account of the milliner was settled on the following morning : her carriage packed by the time she was awake on the morning after—herself and her Oxford volumes—for she was by no means disposed to quarrel with Charles Marshdale's poetry, because he seemed disposed to quarrel with her—placed within it, and her maid and her footmen without ; and all galloping towards the Sussex coast, as fast as four horses could carry them, before St. George's clock had struck ten.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE reception which Mr. Cuthbert gave his lady was such as to make it evident that all wrath and indignation on the subject of her sister's marriage, or any other subject whatever, was merged and lost, in the feelings of joy and gladness which her presence now inspired. Again and again, and again, he thanked her for the amiable alacrity with which she had complied with his summons, and seemed to think that the best reward he could give her for this was the telling her that there was to be music at the Pavilion on the evening of the following day, to which they were invited.

"On the strength of my assurance," added the complacent

husband, "that the message from his Royal Highness, which I had faithfully transmitted to you, would be sure of bringing you hither in time."

"That is all very well," said Mrs. Cuthbert, composedly; "and now, if you please, as I feel exceedingly tired, I shall wish you good night. I have ordered Selby to take a tray into my dressing-room."

"You are quite right, my sweet love! quite right. It would be treason against our good and gracious prince, if you did not take care to be in good looks by to-morrow. I have often told you that he prides himself upon the beauty of the ladies admitted to his private circle, and I can assure you that he has spoken of Mrs. Cuthbert to one or two of his intimates, since he has been here, in a manner that makes it quite evident he considers you as the 'belle par excellence.' If you do but make him understand, my dearest love, that you are really touched, and grateful for all his kindness, it is not long that you will hear yourself called Mrs. Cuthbert. Our coronets are ready for us; we have only, that is, dearest, you have only, to stretch out your hand in token that we are ready to take them."

The heart of poor Harriet swelled within her, and she turned away from him as he attempted to kiss her, with irrepressible disgust.

"Good night," she repeated, retreating towards the door; "I am really too tired to stay with you any longer."

"Quite right! quite right—my sweet love! Do not hurry yourself about getting up to-morrow morning; your first duty towards me at this moment, dearest, as well as to yourself, is to take care of your good looks."

Mrs. Cuthbert profited so well by her amiable husband's permission to remain invisible on the following day, that she never appeared at all till the dinner was announced; and even then she did not seem to be entirely recovered from the fatigue of her journey, for she looked both languid and pale. In truth, she hated so heartily the task she had set herself, or rather the means by which that task was to be performed, that it required all the firmness of purpose which had set her upon it, to prevent her stealing out of the front door of her splendid residence, and finding her way along the coast, till she reached her father's house.

Mr. Cuthbert's first glance at his lady's pale face produced a very unsatisfactory exclamation.

"God bless my soul!" said he; "I never saw you look so plain before in my life!"

Heavy as her heart was, she could not resist smiling at the naïveté of this remark.

"So, so, so," he resumed; "nobody will mind the paleness,

if you will but smile upon them a little. And an evening toilet always does become you so, my sweet love, that there is no fear but that we shall do perfectly well. But, by Heaven!" he added, after the pause of a moment, "this is rather thoughtless on my part, my dearest love! Few men with a coronet hanging within an inch of their heads would think of complaining, because a young wife looked pale. I flatter myself I understand it. I flatter myself I do."

Harriet, however, could not understand him the least in the world; but, to say truth, she did not trouble herself greatly about what his meaning might be, for her head was aching as well as her heart, and she suffered from this the more, because she was almost as anxious herself to appear beautiful before the eyes of the Regent that night, as even her husband could be. For it would not answer her purpose effectually were she merely to get rid of his attentions; it was necessary that the people about him should see how it was done.

And, accordingly, Mrs. Cuthbert never dressed herself, or suffered herself to be dressed, more carefully, or indeed with more perfect success, than on that evening. A large cup of very strong coffee had roused her flagging spirits, and given lustre to her eyes, while the agitation arising from a multitude of feelings caused a flush that, for the hour, well supplied the less brilliant tint of perfect health. She had never spoken to the Prince Regent since she received her father's terrible letter concerning him, and the eagerness of her desire to obey the injunctions it contained, in spirit, though in a manner so perfectly the reverse of what he had dictated, made the approaching interview an affair of no common interest.

Mr. Cuthbert burst into an ecstasy of admiration the moment he beheld her. "Welcome! my dear Lady Corwyn," he exclaimed, as soon as her maid, who had lighted her down-stairs, had closed the door of the drawing-room behind her. "You look ten thousand times lovelier than ever! and if you will only this night remember the duty that you owe your sovereign Prince, the son and representative of our venerated George the Third—if you will only remember, as I am sure your good father has told you a hundred times—if you will only remember that it is your duty to love and honour him—ay, and to amuse, with tenderness and affection, the hours when, laying the cares of state aside, he justly expects that his royal leisure should be cheered by those about him—if you will only do this, I will venture to pledge my word that you shall be a peeress before you are many days older, and, moreover, that I will not object to your paying a visit, some day or other, to your friends at Penmorris."

.Again indignation, and a feeling horribly approaching to

hatred, thrilled through every vein of the outraged wife, who thus heard herself commanded to listen to the Prince, in order that her husband might be made a peer.

"Am I punished!" she muttered between her closed teeth, and turned away from him.

"What do you say, my sweetest love?" demanded her husband, endeavouring to follow her averted face with his eyes. "But we must not waste time in chit-chat; the carriage has been at the door this half hour. Give me your arm, my fairest!"

"Thank you!" said the shuddering wife; "but I must take care of my dress;" an excuse that was quite sufficient for anything she chose to do, or anything she chose not to do. So the future peer called lustily for more lights, and in a few seconds the ill-matched pair were whirled away from the Marine Parade to the Pavilion.

By far the greater part of the company were already seated on benches in the great saloon, which, on this occasion, was fitted up as a concert-room; but when the names of Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert were announced, they were desired to follow a chamberlain into a smaller room, in which the Regent, and about half a dozen ladies and gentlemen, were sipping coffee and liqueurs.

It was evident that the Prince's eye recognised Mrs. Cuthbert the moment she entered the room; but he gave no indication of this, not even by a smile, but stood perfectly still as she walked on towards him, without, however, withdrawing his eyes from her face.

When she had arrived within a few feet of him, she stopped, and made a low and courtly curtsy. His Royal Highness maintained his "statu quo" till it was finished, and then, relaxing both his attitude and countenance, he stepped towards her with both hands extended, and with a smile which many a fair dame would have purchased at the price of a precious trinket.

Mrs. Cuthbert, from utter inability to avoid it, suffered her own hands to rest for an instant in those of her royal host, but as she again curtsied low as she did so, the retiring movement, which almost of necessity follows a reverence so profound, led to the immediate removal of those reluctant hands before her princely admirer could take any measures to prevent it.

"I hear that you have not been well, my dear Mrs. Cuthbert," said the Regent, in a tone of very affectionate interest, "and that was one reason," he added, in a whisper, "for my wishing to see you here. I know of no air more capable of restoring bloom to pallid cheeks than that of Brighton; but I rejoice to see that you do not require it, for the sake of your complexion."

Mrs. Cuthbert bowed, but said nothing.

"Ladies!" said the Prince, turning towards two fair and very elegantly-dressed creatures, who looked much as if they had just walked out of the Book of Beauty, into which they were themselves peeping, as they stood together at a table, "do not let us prevent your enjoying some music, even though we may not be all of us ready for it. My dear Sidney," he added, turning to one of the gentlemen present, "make it known to the orchestra, that I am not to be waited for."

This messenger instantly departed on his errand; and then the Prince bowed very gracefully to the two ladies he had before addressed, who took the salute as it was intended they should do, and began to move off, one or two of the gentlemen putting themselves in act to follow them.

Most fortunately for Harriet, one of these ladies, as well as her noble brother, who was with her, was well known to her; and, as they passed round the side of the table nearest to the spot where she was standing, she quietly passed her arm under that of the lady, saying, in a very low whisper, "Do give me leave to come with you!"

Of course no opposition was made, and the three ladies left the room together, followed by as many gentlemen.

There are occasions, at least in all civilised countries, where no prince living, let him be ever so great a tyrant in his heart, can say to a lady, "Stay," when she has openly demonstrated her inclination to go; unless, indeed, they should happen to be 'tête-à-tête,' which makes a great difference. But this not being the case at the moment I am describing, the Prince Regent neither said nor did anything to impede the departure of pretty Mrs. Cuthbert.

Perhaps his anger, if he were disposed to feel any, was mitigated by the consideration, that pretty Mrs. Cuthbert was too modest to make an exclusion in her own favour, when she saw other ladies dismissed; but be this as it may, he looked after her as she departed with more kindness than wrath, and even smiled complacently enough as he said, half turning his not very moveable person towards her husband, "Upon my word, I think, Mr. Cuthbert, you must have been blinded by excess of anxiety, when you fancied that your lady was indisposed. I never saw any one, not even her fair self, look more lovely; and never looked upon a cheek that, with equal delicacy, showed more perfect health."

This speech addressed positively, absolutely, and unmistakably to himself, relieved the heart of Mr. Cuthbert from the heaviest load of anger, grief, disappointment, and shame that it was well possible for a man to endure and not fall to the earth overpowered it; but such an address, so spoken, so wit-

nessed, so distinctly heard by the very inmost circle of the (to him) sacred region in which he stood, would have almost roused him to new life, had he been in the very act of dying. Nevertheless, his features, not being very flexible, could not immediately perform the feat of activity imposed upon them, but resisted with what every one present felt to be very comic rigidity, the sudden transition required from the expression of mingled rage and despair, to a beaming emanation of gratitude and joy.

To speak, at least articulately, was, however, quite out of the question; and the aspirant noble blessed the scented handkerchief which enabled him to conceal the emotion he could not control.

Not an iota of this was lost upon Lord Lionel Caracole, who had not only a keen perception of the ridiculous, and a good deal of genuine humour about him, but who was actually at this time as industriously and perseveringly engaged in labouring to make his fortune by the practice and display of these qualifications as ever Van Amburgh was when exhibiting himself as the posture-master of wild beasts.

This young nobleman was, moreover, extremely handsome; and all these good gifts together created a hope in the hearts of his family, as well as in his own, that the Regent would, some day or other, reward him for all the laughs and the chuckles which his talents had elicited, by giving him some appointment which might honestly pay for his daily bread, waistcoats, and washing.

The eloquence of the glance which he shot forth from his bright blue eye, as he met that of his royal master, really merited some reward, for it conveyed an epigram and a lampoon at once, without the trouble of reading, or even listening to either.

"My lord," said the Regent, addressing the personage of the highest rank, both in place and peerage, at that moment near him—"will you have the kindness to lead the way to the concert-room? I have five words which I want to say to Lord Lionel, on the subject of a little commission with which I have entrusted him; but I will follow you almost immediately."

All the gentlemen remaining in the room, excepting the favourite, bowed themselves out of the presence without loss of time; and when the last of them was in the act of closing the door, the fat Prince rolled his person round into an arm-chair, and broke into one of his peculiar, unfatiguing, but really enjoyable fits of laughter.

Lord Lionel stood by, half-amused and half-triumphant. "It is nice, your Royal Highness—isn't it?" said he, very quietly. "It is delicious!" was the royal answer. "But upon my

soul, Ly" (this was a pet name, bestowed upon the young nobleman as a sort of affectionate remuneration for his inventive faculties), "that woman is perfect!"

"Husband and all?" returned Lord Lionel.

"Yes, husband and all," replied the Prince. "But do tell me why the pretty fool walked out of the room at the very moment that I so obligingly gave her a hint that she might remain in it?"

"Because she was afraid to stay, I suppose," replied the privy-councillor, in a tone that had no mixture of jesting in it.

"Afraid of what? of her husband?" demanded the Regent.

"No, please your Royal Highness, I did not mean that," returned Lord Lionel, with an air of modest deference.

"Then, what did you mean, sir?" inquired his royal friend, rather gravely. "Tell me, if you please; that is to say, if indeed you meant anything."

"Yes, sir, I did mean something. That woman is awfully afraid of your Royal Highness," said Lord Lionel.

"What the devil do you mean by that? What have I ever done or said that could frighten her? I positively don't think that I can remember any woman since I was fifteen years old, that I have treated with greater respect."

"Not even Lady Carnaby?" demanded the young man, casting down his eyes, with a look of mock humility.

"No, sir, not even Lady Carnaby and her bottle nose!" replied the Prince, with an awful frown. "But what the devil do you mean, Caracole?" he added, looking steadfastly in the face of his companion.

"I scarcely know how to explain myself more fully," returned the young man, fixing his eyes also on the face of his royal friend. "I think Mrs. Cuthbert is afraid of you—you yourself individually, and nothing at all to do with Royal Highness, Prince Regent, or anything of the kind."

"Nonsense!" was the scornful-seeming reply, but uttered in a tone wherein the watchful listener recognised all the pleasure he had intended to inspire.

"You are a fool, Ly, and that is all I shall ever make of you, let me keep you in training as long as I will."

The young nobleman suffered not the slightest expression of any kind to interfere with the regularity of his handsome features, but putting his heels together, and respectfully dropping his eyes, he performed a low and very graceful bow.

"And what is there I can do to soothe her, *mon cher*?" said the Prince.

"Make her husband a peer, please your Royal Highness! Pray, pray, make her husband a peer!" exclaimed Lord Lionel.

with sudden animation, and raising his clasped hands, as if he were begging for his life.

"And what would your right noble, and most noble father say to that, Master Lionel? You know how he execrates such doings," said the Prince.

"If I could suspect my father of being such a traitor as but to breathe a secret wish for the doing, or the not doing, anything which might interfere with, or contribute to, the happiness of your Royal Highness, I would trample his strawberry leaves in the mud with my own boots!" replied Lord Lionel, with great solemnity.

"Out upon ye, hypocrite that you are! Do I not know you? Do I not know that at this moment you are traitorously labouring to make your lawful prince, and hereditary sovereign, commit an act of folly, solely that you may have the audacious gratification of laughing——"

"At, or with?" suddenly exclaimed Lord Lionel, interrupting him with vehemence, and pressing his hands upon his heart, as if the uncontrollable indignation which swelled it, might master his life, as it had his politeness.

"And suppose I give you the benefit of the with, you young villain?" returned the Regent; "how far, think you, will that go to excuse your evil counsels?"

"It will convert treason into devotion," cried the young man—"that is all, please your Royal Highness."

"Sit down, sir; sit down there, exactly opposite to me, and say, if you can, and if you dare, what other benefits you anticipate from my granting a peerage to this old fool, besides that of giving us both, and many others beside, something to laugh at," said the Prince. "For I beg leave to inform you, that although, while enacting the part of Falstaff, you have never shown sufficient honesty to enforce the necessity of it, as he did; notwithstanding this disgraceful deficiency on your part, my Lord Lionel Caraculo, I beg to inform you that I have a conscience."

"I rejoice to hear it," returned the saucy councillor; "and the more so, because I am myself kept in strict order by the same stern monitor. I, too, so please your Royal Highness, have a conscience, and by it I swear that I do think Mrs. Cuthbert is afraid of you, and that I do, moreover, think that the surest way to remove this sort of personal terror would be the conferring upon her husband the title he has contrived to let your highness know, by such an ingenious variety of means, is the object of his most passionate desire."

"And why should my doing so lessen this sort of personal terror, presuming that it really exists?" demanded the Regent.

"Because it might tend to convince her beautiful ladyship that your Royal Highness may have been as much touched by her husband's fête as by her own features, and that all the condescending notice which your Royal Highness has been pleased to bestow on the house of Cuthbert was not altogether intended for her. For none of the ambitious gentleman's emissaries have ever said that the fair lady expressed any anxiety for this title."

"Perhaps you are right," returned the royal lover, musingly. "And who," he added, "can greatly wonder, poor pretty creature, at her not being particularly anxious about obtaining any title that such an idiot was to share with her! And yet, it may, perhaps, please her, nevertheless. I will ask them to dinner, to-morrow, Caracole, and I will watch her ways a little. If she be really afraid of me (and, by Jove, at this moment I would ask for nothing better) I will bedeck and bedizen her stiff old husband, till I have made them both believe that he is himself an especial favourite. And then——"

"And then?" repeated his confidential jester, with a sort of half reproachful, roguish look, such as one gay young reprobate might give another.

"Never trouble yourself about what may chance to follow after," said the Prince, with a little sternness, and quite unconscious of the world of mockery that was laughing in the mischievous eye of his companion, veiled as it was by the longest and thickest black eye-lashes that were ever given to man.

But the word 'old,' from the lips of his aged master, as a term of reproach and ridicule, was almost more than Lord Lionel could stand. He had himself upon this occasion, as upon all similar ones, most carefully abstained from using it, but a multitude of wicked jests arose within him now, as he listened to it from the Prince himself. Lord Ly, however, was much too practised a courtier to indulge himself by breathing the very least of these to the tell-tale air; not the dearest friend he had—no, not his most trusted confidant, had ever heard him utter a jest upon the Prince Regent. Had a comfortable sinecure for life been settled on him, the case might have been different, for Lord Lionel Caracole really had a great deal of fun in him; but, as yet, he had, on this point, been most safely faithful.

"Now then," said the Royal Regent, rising from his deep low seat with some difficulty; "now then, beloved Ly, for the concert-room," and he took hold of the favourite's arm as he spoke. "By-the-bye, Caracole," he added, stopping short before they had reached the door, "I think it would be quite as well if you were to take a little more notice of the Pearl your-

self. There is not the least danger that I should grow jealous. I am not got far enough for that, I think, as yet, and I should like to know, before I actually commit myself by making a declaration in form, whether her very quiet, her almost dull manner of listening and answering to everything I say to her, arises from the fear you talk of, or from anything else ; but, if I give you this commission, you must be true to me—not, observe, by taking care to avoid being too agreeable, but by taking care to be enough so. Will you undertake this?"

"What is there I would not undertake at your bidding?" replied Lord Lionel in a tone that approached as near to the affectionate as he could venture upon, without the risk of being ridiculous. "And yet," he continued, in the same breath, "it is anything but agreeable to be '*aux petits soins*' with a beautiful woman for the express purpose of finding out how agreeable she can make herself, while hearing a sort of solemn whisper in one's ear, the whole time, saying, 'so far shalt thou go, but no further.'"

"Villain! dost thou rebel?" said the Prince, as they passed through the door of the concert-room; "if thou dost, I'll plague thee with pinches." And, with his royal fingers, he vigorously suited the action to the word.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE Prince took the chair prepared for him, and sat for a moment, doubting whether he should, or should not, send an embassy to Mrs. Cuthbert, to request that she would occupy the seat next him. But he decided that he would not.

She was seated, about half-way down the room, upon one of the side benches, and as there was no crowd, he had a very perfect view of her. It was, perhaps, for this reason that he resolved upon taking the present opportunity of making the experiment he had talked of. He certainly was very considerably flattered by Caracole's suggestion that she was afraid of him, which, taken in the sense in which it had been used by his confidential friend and adviser, was anything but disagreeable. He happened to know, too, that Lord Lionel was making very vehement love to a certain beautiful foreigner, who was suspected of beginning to feel rather tenderly disposed towards him ; so that he believed himself to be perfectly safe from all danger of serious rivalry ; and he therefore turned to his favourite, who had, as usual, stationed himself behind his chair, and, giving him an intelligent glance, looked across the room to the spot where Mrs. Cuthbert was sitting.

"To comprehend, is to obey," said Lord Lionel, in the royal ear, as he walked away.

He had been presented to Harriet at the beginning of the season, and had been one of her partners at the ball, so that his approaching her had nothing very startling in it. To Mr. Cuthbert, indeed, who was sitting at as great a distance from his wife as he could do without losing sight of her, Lord Lionel Caracole's moving across the room, from the chair of the Prince Regent to that of Harriet, occasioned a most agreeable flutter; for what could he think of it, but that he was coming to give her his arm in order to conduct her to the side of their royal host? Mrs. Cuthbert thought so too; and she instantly employed herself in arranging the form of words in which she should make known to his Royal Highness her intention of remaining where she was.

But the study was a vain one; for though the young man, as she expected, came up to her, he said not a single word about the Regent. But when a gentleman, who was somewhat inconvenienced by his young lordship's standing immediately before him in order to converse with his fair unknown neighbour, removed to a vacant seat at some distance, Lord Lionel instantly took his place, with the air of thinking himself the most fortunate man in the world, and began conversing anew with great animation.

She would have been better pleased had the opportunity for the intended answer been given her; but, nevertheless, she instantly determined upon putting the time to profit in the best manner she could. She saw that the Regent was watching her, and she thought it extremely likely that, being offended by her having left the drawing-room when she had almost been commanded to stay in it, his Royal Highness had determined upon taking no further notice of her that evening, and had sent the young nobleman, who had always kept at a respectful distance from her when his master was near, on purpose to prove that he had no intention of conversing with her himself.

This arrangement, if not quite, was almost as good as the other, and her mode of proving it so was by conversing with the lively young man in a tone as gay and unembarrassed as his own. The conversation speedily became so animated as to draw many eyes upon them, and nothing certainly could look to a bystander more like a determined flirtation, than the manner in which, despite the music and the singing, and the comparative silence of the rest of the company, Mrs. Cuthbert and Lord Lionel Caracole went on amusing themselves, by laughing and talking with as much freedom as if they were alone.

His Royal Highness the Prince Regent was perfectly en-

chanted by the success of his experiment, and had he, at that moment, held in his hand such a sinecure as Lord Lionel wanted, it would certainly have passed into that of his favourite, when they shook hands that night before parting.

"He is right," thought the royal philosopher, as he meditated on that difficult problem, a woman's mind. "It is not that she is dull, it is not that she is constitutionally shy, it is not that she is a straight-laced puritan, afraid of being looked at by any man but her husband, but it is that her spirits, pretty creature, have been overpowered by the unexpected proximity of her sovereign. It is perfectly natural; and to treat her harshly for it would be absolute brutality. Besides," continued the self-accusing Prince, "I am afraid that even in the distant village where she was born and reared, she must have heard somewhat too much of—of our thoughtless levities; and this it is, pretty soul, that more than all the rest has terrified her. I will never use her harshly. No, by Heaven! In early youth we must all hope that a frail man may stand excused, if, thoughtless as a newly-fledged butterfly, he flies with young inconstancy from flower to flower. But now she shall find that the case is different."

So tenderly touched was the Prince by the discovery which he thought he had made, that he determined not to agitate the feelings of the woman he so greatly favoured, by uttering any more marked "Good night," than his parting bow, distributed to all his guests alike. Nay, for fear he should in any way alarm her too sensitive timidity, he ordered that the dinner invitation with which he intended to honour her husband and herself, should be sent out for two days later; and, in the interval, he intended to amuse himself with sending instructions to the proper quarter, for conferring on her husband the title of Baron Cuthbert, Viscount Corwyn. The communicating of this news to her would, he thought, be a very satisfactory touchstone of her real feelings towards himself.

Mrs. Cuthbert, on her part, was scarcely less satisfied with the events of the evening, than was her royal admirer. The having left the drawing-room she considered as an admirable 'tour de force,' which had evidently produced a very good effect; and her lively conversation with Lord Lionel Caracole must have convinced the Prince, she thought, if anything could, of the real estimate she put upon his conversation. "And if he be not sufficiently aware of it already, I will go on in the same unceremonious sort of style till he is," thought the courageous lady, as her carriage swept off from the portico of the regal dwelling.

But how did Mr. Cuthbert like it all? What were his feelings upon first seeing his low-minded, low-born, and almost

idiot wife, creep, like a disgraced spaniel, out of the royal presence, at the very moment that the gracious sovereign had chosen to exhibit before the eyes of his most familiar associates the pre-eminence of his condescending partiality to her

He felt, as he thought of it, as if he must decidedly go mad ! And how did he relish what followed ? What were his feelings, as he saw the favourite boldly walk off, in order to amuse himself, 'à volonté,' in laughing and flirting with the some-time honoured beauty, who hitherto had been approached as cautiously by the courtiers, when their sovereign was in presence, as if she had been the actual partner of his greatness ?

And what, in his heart of hearts, did he think the daring woman at his side deserved, for welcoming the attentions of the young gentleman who had hit upon the pastime of making love to her, for his evening's amusement, in the style she had done ? Could he have locked her up for life in the deepest dungeon of Corwyn Castle, he thought, on his honour and conscience, that it would be doing no more than justice.

For a few short moments after they drove off, the furious husband was as silent as the contented wife, for he positively was at a loss to find words sufficiently forcible to express his feelings. But Harriet heeded not his silence, nor bestowed a single thought on what might have been his observations upon her conduct. She was reviewing the events of the evening with a thankful heart, and breathing something very like a prayer that her courage might be sustained till she had released herself effectually and for ever from the insulting flattery of the Royal Lothario.

But her meditations were at this point very roughly broken in upon by the voice of her husband, who suddenly ejaculated these words—

"Viper !—false, ungrateful, infamous viper ! Do you expect that I will endure it, madam ? Do you really expect that I will suffer you to degrade yourself before my eyes, before the eyes of my sovereign, before the eyes of the first nobility of England, by carrying on a most indecent flirtation in my presence ?"

Mrs. Cuthbert was rather startled ; but the absolute indifference with which, after the first effect of his loud voice was past, she listened to his harangue, proved that every species of feeling for him, whether kind or unkind, was completely merged in and overpowered by contempt.

She knew she was in no danger of her life from his violence, because he would be afraid of the consequences of killing her ; nor did the idea of the Welsh castle very seriously alarm her. She had great respect for the laws of England, and did not give her husband credit for being sufficiently cunning

to evade them. In short, and in sober earnest, she feared him not.

The only thing she really did fear was the continuance of her dear and honoured father's belief in the degrading accusation which he had heard against her ; and her heart was light, it was even joyous, as she listened to the words her furious husband now uttered, because they bore testimony to the ability and to the success with which she had commenced her operations.

As she neither spoke nor moved, Mr. Cuthbert really thought for a moment that she had fainted under the terror occasioned by his tremendous wrath, and, either to rouse her from her fit, or to ascertain satisfactorily that she had fallen into it, he seized her by the arm, and shook her with considerable violence.

The effect produced on his nerves by her now saying, exactly in her usual voice, not the hundredth part of a tone either higher or lower, "Pray do not touch my arm in that way, Mr. Cuthbert !" might, if witnessed, have furnished a useful lesson to ladies, upon the tactics of domestic quarrels. His discomposure was in exact proportion to her calmness.

He remained perfectly silent for several minutes ; the first portion of which interval was passed in recovering himself from the positive shock which her tone of voice had given him ; and the latter in reasoning, as best he could, upon the occult source of the inconceivable courage which had enabled her to adopt it.

Suddenly the idea suggested itself that she had really and truly fallen in love with Lord Lionel Caracole ; that the highly-disgusted Prince, having declared to his favourite that he should take no further notice of her, the said favourite had asked and obtained permission to make love to her himself, and that the astounding audacity she now displayed arose from her having at once made up her mind to elope with one young man, instead of taking advantage of the honourable protection offered her by two old ones.

Had it not been for his bitter disappointment on the subject of the title, Mr. Cuthbert was in a humour to have endured such a discovery with great philosophy. He was already beginning to feel that the reputation for receiving in the very first style in London was not to be achieved by a gentleman of ten thousand a year, without peril ; and that the worst possible preparation for making the attempt was the marrying a girl without a sou.

This sort of wisdom generally comes too late for use, but Mr. Cuthbert flattered himself that in his case it was not so. If the ungrateful, ill-advised idiot beside him were really capable of preferring an intrigue with a penniless spendthrift to

the flattering patronage of such a sovereign as the Prince Regent, she deserved to "undergo the severest penalty of the law," and to divorce her, and look out for a rich wife, either young or old, handsome or ugly, were thoughts that brought much comfort and consolation with them. But the idea of the lost title stung him still. "It would have been done so easily too, had the unworthy woman at his side possessed one single particle of proper feeling." But this game was up; every chance of honour and promotion by the help of his wife seemed gone for ever; and he ground his preternaturally handsome teeth together with imprudent violence as he muttered, very little above a whisper, "You shall live to repent it."

Mrs. Cuthbert heard the threat, but heeded it not. The one great object that she had in view superseded every other consideration so completely, that the silence which followed was much more welcome to her, because it left her at liberty to meditate upon the manner in which she was completely to accomplish her object, than from any feeling of terror at the threatened vengeance of her companion.

But, unfortunately, there was yet another witness of the flirtation in the concert-room whose feelings, as he watched its progress, were of a deeper character than those either of the mistaken Prince, or the equally mistaken husband.

This witness was Charles Marshdale.

The intelligent reader has probably already guessed by what means the unfortunate Mr. Hartwell had been led to believe that the beloved and lovely child whom he had so carefully reared in ignorance of evil, and in love and reverence for what was good, had been already led to make the tremendous leap from folly to sin, which, though widely severed, still stand eternally within reach of each other; the reader has probably guessed that this appalling intelligence reached the unhappy father in the parting interview which took place between himself and Charles Marshdale, at the time of Mary's marriage.

The sudden, brilliant, and most unexpected career of Charles has already been sufficiently made known to render any very detailed account of it here unnecessary. It was a noble college friend who had first urged him to publish what he had written; and it was the same friend who, when it had been received by the public with a degree of almost unequalled favour, as well merited as it was unexpected by the author, had taken him with him to London, less, perhaps, for the purpose of making a further engagement with his publisher, than for enjoying the pleasure of introducing the new-born lion to the world.

Young Marshdale had, on the whole, borne his sudden elevation to popular fashion and favour with great philosophy

though there was one point at which a little weakness of individual character peeped out. He shrank from the idea that the descendant of half a hundred knightly ancestors should be tolerated in the mansions he was now so unexpectedly permitted to enter, solely because he had put rhymes to some of the thoughts of his boyhood. This sort of absurdity, however, was confined to his own breast, so it did him little harm.

On first being, at Mr. Cuthbert's particular request, presented to him, he felt considerable difficulty in preventing himself from turning short on his heel and running away, and rather more difficulty still, perhaps, in accepting his urgent invitation (delivered in person) to his ball. But in this latter case, a strong feeling of curiosity combated his repugnance; and he went, not for the purpose of seeing what Harriet Hartwell's house might be, but in what sort of manner she conducted herself in it.

It was with great difficulty that he sustained his equanimity when he first beheld her in her Cornish dress; her greatly-improved beauty, and the touching recollection of her native village, which her choice of this dress seemed to indicate, brought a pang to his heart and a tear to his eye. But he was not long left to muse upon the sweet and bitter fancies thus suggested; for a recently-made acquaintance, who had probably remarked the earnestness of his gaze, asked him, with a very intelligent smile, if he understood the reason why their lovely hostess had attired herself after that remarkable fashion?

"Do you?" was the equivocal reply.

"Why, yes, my dear fellow, '*nous autres*'—that is to say, the initiated—know perfectly well all about it; and, in case the court gossip should not have reached your academic shades, I will do myself the honour of explaining the mystery to you."

And then followed a very lively narrative, in which the conquest of the fat Prince by the fair lady was given at length, accompanied by a few ludicrous expressions of juvenile compassion for the poor deluded old husband, who seemed to look on so unsuspectingly while this amusing farce was played before his eyes.

Deeply shocked by the dissolute lightness with which his gay acquaintance recited this detestable history, young Marshdale turned away from him, honestly and devoutly hoping that the whole statement was completely false. He sheltered himself wherever the crowd was thickest, and watched her narrowly. Her attention to her royal guest was certainly unremitting, yet there were moments when he could not but fancy that she looked more wearied than gratified by the as constant attention she received in return; and he pretty nearly succeeded in persuading himself that the whole statement was a most

infamous slander, and that the coincidence between her dress and the Cornish Dukedom was purely accidental.

He next watched her as she followed her husband from the room before supper, and still felt convinced that she was solely and busily occupied in so doing the honours of her house to her illustrious guest, as to bring no disgrace upon her own rusticity.

This conviction restored him to his usual state of spirits, and during her absence he rather sought than shunned all those with whom he was sufficiently acquainted to converse, and to ask a question or two concerning the general opinion of Mrs. Cuthbert's beauty, and of the manner in which she had adapted herself to a style of life so perfectly new to her.

On the subject of her beauty there certainly seemed to be no diversity of opinion; the Regent had set the fashion of declaring that she was the most beautiful woman who had appeared that season, and there were very few dissentient voices; and also as to the clever facility with which the 'Pearl of the Duchy' had been converted into a fine lady. This, too, seemed to be as generally acknowledged.

But then followed the history of this pretty sobriquet; and the heart of poor Charles was again wrung by hearing the most unequivocal allusions made to the terms upon which the so lately innocent young creature, who had been the recent idol of his life, was now living with the dissipated old Prince who had bestowed it upon her.

Sick at heart, he was turning to quit the room, and the house, when a movement was seen among the company, as they made way for Mrs. Cuthbert to approach the Regent, in the garb of Anne Boleyn.

The rest is easily guessed. Every voice he heard, in every tone of whisper and of sneer, was making a commentary upon this too plainly speaking act of the courtly pantomime; but not a single one amongst them all expressed a doubt of the degrading fact, that she thereby publicly declared herself, as it were, the elected favourite of the Prince.

It is needless to attempt describing the depth of sorrow into which all this plunged poor Charles Marshdale, and his grief was doubled by the thought of what all those who were nearest and dearest to him would suffer, when the hateful degradation of one whom they had all so dearly loved, should become as publicly known in the country as it seemed already to be in town.

Within half an hour after this splendid re-appearance of the unfortunate Harriet, Charles had retreated to the shelter of his own quiet lodging, and, with his throbbing temples resting upon his hand, sat meditating upon the possibility of

doing something that might yet withdraw her from the vortex of vice and suffering into which she had so madly plunged.

One way, and one only, suggested itself. Could her father immediately be made acquainted with what was going on, his once-loved and almost sacred voice might yet avail to save her. But, alas! this was not only the one hope, but the only way of realising it was, by himself conveying to the peaceful, happy Vicarage of Penmorris, the information which he would have given years of life to keep from it for ever! It was, in truth, a dreadful task. But the high-feeling young man performed it, in the last interview which has been described between him and Mr. Hartwell; after often-repeated attempts to do so, which had as often failed, till the now or never spur of the last moment had given him the sort of desperate strength necessary to effect it.

I will not pause to describe the manner in which Mr. Hartwell received the intelligence; it would make a painful picture; but he thanked the suffering bearer of these dreadful tidings with true affection and most earnest gratitude; and having told him that he should as yet endeavour to keep them a secret from all, and should immediately write such a letter to his unhappy child as he should think most likely to produce a good effect, he went on to entreat that he would not fail to profit by every opportunity that accident might throw in his way, in order to ascertain if her conduct was in any degree changed in consequence.

This the unwilling spy reluctantly promised he would do, as it was obviously the only means by which her poor anxious father could hope to obtain the information by which he should regulate his future conduct; and it was while he was in the act of performing this promise, that he witnessed the apparent apathy of the Prince, and Mrs. Cuthbert's vehement flirtation with Lord Lionel.

Was the one affair ended, and another begun?

Or, was she thus conducting herself in the hope of stimulating the languid attachment of her royal admirer by a feeling of jealousy?

Or, was all he had heard against her gross exaggeration, and her light conduct merely the result of vanity?

In either case she stood before him in terrible contrast to all he had once thought her, and with all that his heart and his principles told him a woman ought to be. Every feeling approaching either to the sublimity, or to the weakness of love, seemed utterly stifled and destroyed within him; but, nevertheless, there was a difference between the three possibilities which had suggested themselves, and if the last was nearest to the truth, she might, perhaps, be saved by the ju

cious efforts of her father, from such a state of degradation as must blight the honour of her family in the eyes of the whole world. And, therefore, though he sickened at the task, he determined to watch her still.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE day which followed the concert at the Pavilion might have produced some rather stirring scenes between Mr. Cuthbert and his lady, had not the descent of the latter from her dressing-room been preceded by the arrival of a servant in the royal livery, bearing to them a card of invitation to dine with the Regent on the next day but one.

The hour of noon was past, but Mrs. Cuthbert was still enclosed in the small room allotted to her private use, the only recommendation of which was that it commanded a widely-extended sea view. But the pleasure this might have given her was greatly narrowed by the glare of unmitigated light which fell upon it. Harriet dearly loved the sea, and she would have given much to have been able fearlessly to seek some spot where she might have sat securely in the shade, and managed her look-out upon it better. But not even for the bolder beauty of her own dear Cornish coast would she have ventured to exchange the tranquillity of her own apartment for the possible adventures she might encounter out of it, and she fully intended to remain where she was till the hour of dinner; but this prudent resolution was rendered vain by the following written message from her lord and master:—

“MY DEAREST LOVE!

“Let us both be thankful that no serious evil seems likely to be the consequence of the unlucky misunderstanding of last night! I have received—but let me have the happiness of communicating this startling intelligence in person—forgive, I beseech you, the irritation of my feelings during our drive home last night. You know not, my sweet love, how keenly everything touches me, which appears in any way likely to compromise your dignity, and the high estimation in which it is my glory to see you held by the sovereign. Forgive this! and do me the favour of letting me see you as soon as possible in the drawing-room.

“Your devoted husband,

“JOHN FREDERIC AUGUSTUS CUTHBERT”

Mrs. Cuthbert read this with a bitter smile. "There is more work to do yet," she murmured inwardly; "but it shall be done.—Tell your master, Selby," she said aloud, "that I am coming into the drawing-room presently." And, ere very long, Mrs. Cuthbert did go into the drawing-room, but she did not hurry herself; part of her system being to make her husband understand that she intended to be a rebellious wife, and that she stood in no awe of him whatever.

This part of her task, at least, she might have considered as accomplished, could she have been aware of the rage which seemed to curdle Mr. Cuthbert's blood as he received this message, and remained waiting till its ungracious promise was fulfilled. But there was no chance of her making this satisfactory discovery on the present occasion; for no gale of spring, no cushet dove, no new-born lambkin ever exhibited more gentleness than did the invited guest of the Prince Regent, when his beautiful young wife appeared before him.

"My sweetest love!" he exclaimed, advancing with extended hand to meet her. "How like your charming self this is—coming to my too imperious summons so readily! Look here, my dearest Harriet! here is proof positive that you are the best courtier of the two. I protest to you, my love, that I was most painfully alarmed last night, when I perceived that your having left the presence, after it had been so graciously intimated that you might remain in it, was followed by no notification that you might be permitted to approach his Royal Highness's chair during the concert. But now, I have not the least doubt in the world but that you understood what you were about a great deal better than I did; and probably his favourite young friend, Lord Lionel, was sent to you expressly to discover what your motive might have been for making such a sudden retreat. The account he gave was certainly not an unfavourable one; for, look at this, my sweet love! These invitations to dinner are, I believe, by no means very generally sent, even among the very highest nobility, and I will not deny that I feel greatly flattered by it. The Regent's manner to myself, individually, has certainly of late been more than gracious—it has been friendly; I could almost say, affectionate. Depend upon it, my sweet love, I shall very soon have the heartfelt satisfaction of saluting you as Lady Gorwyn."

Disgusted beyond all power of concealing it, Mrs. Cuthbert's beautiful lip curled itself into an expression of the deepest scorn, as she replied, "We shall see!" And having said this, she turned haughtily away from him, and left the room.

It was not rage which took possession of her husband's

bosom, as she closed the door after her. The current of his blood, instead of being accelerated, seemed petrified. He stood precisely where she had left him, with the immobility of a statue, and the only feeling of which he was conscious was that of unmixed astonishment. "What does she mean? What is she about?" he muttered, with his eyes fixed in a vacant stare upon the door. And then suddenly his limbs and his features relaxed, and he sunk into a chair.

"Gracious Heaven!" thought he, "is it possible that the ungrateful wretch has any hope of being made a duchess in her own right?"

For a moment this terrible idea seemed to overwhelm him, and he drew his handkerchief forth, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. To this state succeeded at least half an hour of intense thinking, the result of which may be gathered from the following monologue, half muttered and half meditated.

"No; it is impossible! The days of duchess-making are past; not even Louis the Eighteenth would venture it, and I am quite sure the Prince Regent dare not. Whatever step she gets, I must get the same—I am quite sure of it. Nevertheless, there is something devilish queer in the new airs she gives herself. Yet who knows? perhaps it may only be because she feels her power. Clever creature! If this be so, I ought to adore her still, in spite of all her insolence—and so I will; or, at least, I will make her think so for a time. I dare say she has never dreamed of asking for her bill at the milliner's. And when the coronet is once safely on my head, it will be time enough to prove myself a high-minded English gentleman by getting rid of her."

Many other thoughts of the same noble nature chased each other through his brain before he changed his attitude; and then he rang for his valet, and caused to be put upon his venerable shoulders a new and richly-laced riding-frock, in which attire he mounted a beautiful horse, which might have rivalled an abbot's well-trained mule in docility, and, followed by his smart groom, sunned his budding nobility for a few hours in every part of Brighton and its immediate vicinity where he thought he was most certain of being seen.

It will readily be understood that it made no part of Mrs. Cuthbert's policy to excuse herself from any party at the Pavilion; she kept herself, however, very much out of sight during the almost three days which elapsed, before that fixed for the eight-o'clock dinner at which she was commanded to be present, arrived, contenting herself meanwhile with such a portion of air and exercise as very early rising could give her, without any danger of meeting either "the Court," or any of

its appendages. This arrangement enabled her to enjoy a morning walk of many miles, which would have been more enjoyable still, had not the rambling construction of the town and its adjuncts given the air of a long street to so great an extent of the cliff, that she felt obliged to hasten her return, lest she should find herself walking alone through a busy crowd.

But on the second morning of her thus sallying forth, she boldly attempted the adventure of climbing the nearest hill she could find that offered the temptation of a green sward to her feet, and having mounted to its summit, she hurried on from height to height with a greater feeling of pleasure and liberty than she had dared to hope for.

But it was very long since she had taken such a fatiguing walk—the sun, too, was already high enough to make it hot—trees there were none; but she espied a spot which was shaded by a sort of cliff, which overhung what seemed to be the commencement of a quarry, and to this spot she directed her steps, for the purpose of resting and cooling herself before she set off on her return.

Delighted to have really found shade, where shade seemed utterly banished by nature, she nestled into the darkest corner of the little retreat, scaring a trio of sheep thereby, and, seating herself upon a convenient lump of chalk, enjoyed both the freshness of the sea-breeze, and the sight of the sea itself, so much as to make her very unmindful of the time.

She had no watch with her, and might have been thoughtless enough to enjoy her freedom for a good while longer, had she not been disturbed by the approach of a gentleman, who, upon seeing her, stopped short, and then seemed preparing to turn round and take himself off again, when she recognised the features of Charles Marshdale.

She immediately rose, pronouncing his name at the same time, in the old familiar accents of their former intimacy. He stood still, of course, and took his hat off, returning her greeting by a very ceremonious bow.

At that moment she might be said to have forgotten that he was a poet, and the poet ‘par excellence,’ so completely did the sight of him restore her to Penmorris, and all things appertaining to it; and therefore it was, that this formal bow pained her more now than his lately-assumed distant bearing had ever done before.

“How can I have offended him?” thought she; and then returned the recollection of the Opera-box, and of his visit to her previous to her leaving town, and she felt convinced that it all proceeded from a feeling of shyness produced by her sudden elevation to wealth and station.

She could not endure that such a feeling should exist ; and she stretched out both her hands towards him with the very sweetest, kindest smile that ever beamed from a lovely face. And how did he receive it ? With a frown, the severity of which he was in some sort conscious of ; and, wishing to conceal it from her, did so by casting his eyes upon the ground, and drawing his hat low over his forehead.

The man of genius and the acknowledged philosopher was at that moment lamentably behind Mrs. Hartwell's silly little Harry, both in generosity of feeling and real purity of heart ; for, if the whole truth must be told, the poetical gentleman was covertly suspecting, that the solitude of his innocent companion either had not been, or was not intended to be, of long continuance ; nor would he have been in the least degree surprised had he seen the handsome face of Lord Lionel Caracole peeping round the mass of stones that formed a sort of rude pillar beside the little quarry.

But as this did not happen, he felt himself compelled, by what seemed an absolute necessity, to walk beside Mrs. Cuthbert—at least for a few minutes. And what was the interpretation that he put upon the cordial and familiar accents in which she conversed with him ? Why, he came to the dreadful conclusion that she was become so desperate, so entirely unprincipled a coquette, as to find pleasure and amusement, in the absence of her royal and noble lovers, from endeavouring to rekindle in him the love which, when still innocent, she had so harshly and so cruelly despised ; and thus they walked on together, each misinterpreting every syllable and every accent of the other so completely that it would be difficult to say which of them was furthest from the truth.

But this, which was only vexatious to Mrs. Cuthbert, was positive agony to her companion ; till, unable any longer to endure the well-known sound of the voice which had once been so inexpressibly dear to him, under circumstances so fearfully changed, he abruptly stopped, and drawing out his watch, said, in accents of ill-repressed agitation, "Pray excuse me, Mrs. Cuthbert, I have an engagement which I should be sorry to miss." And, without waiting for her answer, he plunged down the steep side of the hill, the more practicable path in which they had been walking leading to the little table-land on which stands the old parish church.

Now it chanced that while Mrs. Cuthbert was preparing for her walk, Selby had asked if she would want her again soon, for that if she thought she should not, she, Selby, should like to take a bath in the sea.

"I shall not want you at all, Selby, till after breakfast," was her mistress's good-natured reply ; and so they parted.

But upon the waiting-maid's setting forth, and facing the sea into which it was her intention to plunge her dainty limbs, her courage failed her. She re-entered the house, deposited her marine toilet, and then set off again to employ the leave of absence granted her, by taking a walk to the churchyard, which had been named to her as a favourable point from which to contemplate "the view."

In this churchyard, therefore, she was standing, when her mistress and young Marshdale approached it, and she was quite right in supposing that Mrs. Cuthbert perceived her at the very same moment at which she was herself perceived. And the next thing she saw was the sudden pause made by the young gentleman, and his still more sudden descent down the face of the hill.

Nothing, certainly, could look more like an escapade intended to keep the evading party out of sight, and it was in this light that Mrs. Selby considered it, as will be seen hereafter.

As to Mrs. Cuthbert, she was no sooner left to herself than she began to meditate upon the altered manners of Charles.

"No!" thought she—"no; it cannot be all on account of the royal message, nor yet because of my fine house, and the rest of it. It might possibly have been so at first; but I have been so particularly desirous to make him feel that I am the same humble Harriet that I used to be, that it really seems perfectly impossible he should continue to feel afraid of me." And then a new thought struck her, and her fair cheeks became as red as crimson.

"Can it be that he remembers that last scene in the shrubbery between us, and that so seriously as to make him feel awkward about it now?"

But this idea was rejected almost as soon as it suggested itself.

"Had I shown any foolish recollection of it myself," thought she, "it would have given an embarrassment to my manner which might naturally enough have produced a similar embarrassment in him; but I know, most perfectly well, that this has not been the case."

And then, again, another thought came across her, and, unfortunately for her happiness, she could not dismiss this as rapidly as she had done those which preceded it.

"Can it be possible," she again asked herself—"can it be possible that he, too, has heard, and at full length, the same horrid tale that has reached my father?"

Every succeeding moment seemed to strengthen her belief that so it must be.

She recalled the evening of her fatal ball. She recollected perfectly that the tall and melancholy figure, clothed in the

sable dress of Hamlet, had glided about, perpetually within sight of her, yet perpetually beyond the reach of being spoken to. Why had he done this? What was there in the bright and festive scene likely to excite the sort of ill-timed sadness he had so strongly manifested? There was but one thing which could reasonably have done it, and that was the dreadful levity—the hateful coquetry which must have been apparent in her own conduct.

She now knew and understood it all herself, and there could not have been a single eye that looked upon her during that evening more inclined to contemplate the scene with indignation and disgust, than she now felt her own to be.

It was this, then—it was this hated ball, and all the odious imputations that must of necessity have followed upon it, that had robbed her of her early friend; and the last steps towards her home were taken hastily, that she might creep within the shelter of her house to weep.

Her maid, Selby, followed her at no great distance, and, being curious to know whether her mistress would say anything to her respecting her walk, she took the liberty of entering the lady's dressing-room, and inquired, very respectfully, if she were wanted. Mrs. Cuthbert was certainly at that moment not in a very conversable humour, and answered "No!" without adding another word.

The manner of poor Harriet to her maid was usually so kind, and almost affectionate, that this unwonted abruptness was felt to be an offence; and Selby, giving one short but steady look into the face of her mistress, retired with this keen remark ready for the first comer who might be ready to listen to it—"Missis was quite right not to begin talking if she wasn't in the humour for it, for there was no need of words for one who has got eyes as sharp as mine."

But it did not happen that any individual, likely to be amused by the observations of Mrs. Selby, did cross her steps at that particular moment; and she therefore retired to the tiny apartment which was assigned her at the back of the house, and determined immediately to write a letter to dear, good Sarah, who must find it dull enough at home with so few of the young men-servants left, and that crossest of old crones, the housekeeper, schooling her from morning to night.

So, in a spirit of the most amiable charity, she sat down at the little table upon which stood the tidy paper-case and travelling ink-bottle which always accompanied her, for the sake of setting down the linen when it went to the laundress and the like.

Now Mrs. Selby was a very ready writer, an accomplishment upon which she a good deal prided herself, and which certainly

made the social duty of writing to a friend a task that gave her more pleasure than pain, especially if she had anything particular to say. The epistle she now produced was as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I heartily wish that your station in life was the same as my own; if it was only for the advantage of taking you oftener out of town into the country; for it cannot be doubted that the change is greatly improving to the general health and complexion. I have been taking a fine blow this morning upon the hill; but it is not about this that I feel the greatest want to talk to you. I am too affectionate in my nature not to care more about men and women than about hills, or even the sea either. Do you mind, Sarah, the long talk that you and I had about missis just about three days, I think it was, before we left town? We both owned outright, I believe, that for once in our lives we was puzzled, and yet I don't think that we are either of us that very stupid neither. But, at any rate, I think I will take upon me to say, that if you had seen as much as I have, you would not be far behind me in guessing why somebody that we know is so often to be seen with her eyes, as handsome as they are, looking as red as a ferret's. Heaven is my witness that I never mentioned the thing to mortal man, woman, or child, and one reason is that I never thought much about it myself, for there was no cause I should, till now. But seeing is believing, as everybody knows; and you shall now judge for yourself. I was hired, you know, before they were married, and went down to the cottage-sort of a parsonage-house that she comed from, in order to put her dress on decent for the wedding, and to pack up her things for the journey. You will easily believe, my dear friend, that I did not feel that much anxious to make intimacy with the servants of a little parsonage-house, as I might have done if appearances had been different; and, accordingly, I never did have overmuch familiar conversations with the two maids and the man (quite a bumpkin) who formed the whole establishment. And therefore, in course, I heard nothing of any lovers that the beautiful young bride might have had before our rich old master got sight of her. But that there was something of this kind I am now going to prove to you.

"Every soul in the parsonage-house, except one old soul from the workhouse, I believe, who was put there to see that the water for the tea at the breakfast did not boil over, every living soul but her went into the church to see the wedding. I, for one, don't care much about church ceremonies, if I don't happen myself to have anything particular to do with them; and so my eyes, as was natural, was wandering about the old-

building, instead of being fixed like the rest upon what was going on at the altar. I knew, in course, everything that the bride had on, because I had dressed her myself, and so, as I said before, I looked about the church for my amusement. My eyes are pretty sharp, my dear friend, and I had not looked long before I spied out the leg of a man who was, nevertheless, plainly enough trying all he could to hide himself behind a pillar about half-way down the church. If he had let his leg alone, I dare say I should have taken no particular account of it; but the moment that I saw, he drew it up like, and made himself so remarkably scarce, I naturally enough determined that I would not look at anything else but him. And no more I did; and the consequence was that I got what I wanted; for when the whole business was over, and all the people was on the move, my hide-and-seek chap darted away from his pillar, and whisked himself through a side-door in a jiffy! But he wasn't that quick enough to prevent my seeing that he was a fine-looking, tall young fellow, with an uncommon handsome face for those as admire coal-black hair, and pale skin, and a proud look, very much as if he might have been a gentleman; though, to say truth, his dress was not very much in that line.

"Well; I said nothing to nobody, as I told you before; and there was no great time for it neither then, for there was enough to do, what with eating my own breakfast and seeing to the packing of the carriage, and saying a civil good-by to the servants, and so forth; and from that day to this, I don't think that any idea of anything at all about the black-haired chap ever came into my head. But the case is different now, my dear friend; I am not such a fool but what I can put two and two together, if the time between was ever so long.

"And now, if you will just mind what I am going to say, I will make you as wise as I am myself on this subject. This morning I got leave, between a very early getting-up time and breakfast, to do what I would with myself; and for the good reason, as you will see, that my missis intended to do what she liked with herself, too. My choice was, to walk up the hill to the church-yard to look at the view; and as I don't know a living soul here as yet, I had nothing for it, in course, but to go by myself; but my missis was better off. While I was standing staring about on all sides, what should I see but my missis and a tall young gentleman walking side by side towards the church-yard, where I was standing.

"Take my word for it, Sarah, that they saw me, at least I know that she did, for I caught her eye upon me; and what do you think happened the minute after? Why the young gentleman took off his hat, made a very short speech, all in a

hurry like, to my missis, and then darted off down a perfect precipice, as missis used to call the Welsh rocks at Corwyn, and got himself out of sight in less than no time.

"But he had better not have taken off his hat, Sarah, for no sooner did he do it than I knew him to be the same young man as was behind the pillar, as well as if I had never taken my eyes off him from that time to this; but that black hair of his curls in a way that one doesn't often see.

"And now, then, what do you think of the red eyes?

"Poor dear soul! I am sure I pity her with all my heart and soul; and would not do her a mischief for all that could be offered to me. It is easy to guess, that it was her gray-headed old father made the match for her; and she, poor young thing, over head and ears in love all the time with this unfortunate youth! It is quite like a novel—isn't it? But I must waste no more time in writing, for I have lots of things to do; so no more at present from your affectionate friend,

"M. SELBY."

The painful conviction which had taken possession of Mrs. Cuthbert's mind respecting the idea Charles Marshdale had conceived of her, greatly depressed her spirits; and certainly rendered the task she had set herself of offending, and even openly affronting the Prince, by proving to him and to every one else within reach of seeing and criticising her, that she preferred the attention and conversation of every other man to his, a very harassing and fatiguing one.

But she looked round her in vain for any other means of saving herself from the perils into which her unprincipled husband had plunged her. The proving to the fashionable world, and to all the echoing gossips who were sure to follow it, that she openly and firmly rejected all the honours of favouritism, while still remaining within reach of them, appeared to be the only means left by which she could escape from her present miserable thralldom.

But the doing it required great energy, great courage, and great skill. Where was she to find all this? Her spirit, her very heart, seemed to sink and die within her. She had lost the esteem of her father, and now felt crushed under the harsh judgment of her earliest friend. Never did a young creature feel more in want of some friendly hand to support her, or more oppressed by the feeling that she knew not in which direction to turn, in the hope of finding it.

And it was then, as if determined to feel the full weight of all her misery at once, that she opened the little volume which she already knew so well, on purpose to dwell upon the dignity and the purity of the mind which now so evidently contem-

plated hers with aversion and contempt. But all her weakness seemed turned into strength as she read on. There was in it a tone of such noble confidence in virtue, of such deep contempt for a wrong-reasoning and wrong-judging world, that she gradually imbibed somewhat of the self-sustaining spirit of the author. She kissed the page in gratitude for the noble lesson it had given her; and felt as if she had there found the friendly and protecting hand she wanted. After this, she wavered no more, nor even suffered "I dare not" to wait upon "I would," till she had effectually obtained the object she had in view.

What she obtained besides, is another thing; but this, too, shall be disclosed with as little delay as possible.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FROM the moment the dinner invitation had arrived from the Pavilion, Mr. Cuthbert had persevered in an unbroken course of tender observance, and the most flattering assiduity, towards his lady; not only did she seem restored to her former enviable place in his heart, but to stand infinitely higher in his esteem and affection than she had ever done before. He fell into a still greater ecstasy when he beheld her as she left her dressing-room upon this occasion, than he had done upon the evening of the concert; and it must be confessed, that she did indeed look magnificently beautiful.

Perhaps, the mind is never actively at work in any way, without embellishing the features. This is what we call expression, but we should speak more intelligibly if we called it soul; for expression does not of necessity embellish beauty, inasmuch as there may be an expression of bodily pain—nay, even of mere bodily weakness—stamped on the features, whereas any operation of the soul, sufficiently powerful to affect the features of the face, never fails to produce something analogous to admiration in the beholder, even should those features be homely; for it is then that the higher part of our nature becomes visible, and we all bow before it, though often without knowing why.

And thus it was when Mrs. Cuthbert entered the little drawing-room at the Pavilion, the day she dined there.

The party was not large; there were only five gentlemen, including the royal host himself, and two ladies, besides Mrs. Cuthbert; and not one of them, either male or female, but looked at her with admiration.

The Prince was seated when she entered, but he was on his feet in a moment, meeting her in the middle of the room, and placing her upon a sofa close beside which his own favourite chair was stationed, with an almost ostentatious air of flattering welcome. The Cuthberts were the last guests who arrived, and the dinner was announced almost immediately.

One of the ladies present was an English duchess, and it was all but impossible that even at the Pavilion, whence etiquette was often very studiously banished, the Regent could avoid leading her out to dinner. Nevertheless, he did certainly for a moment seem to doubt about it ; so much so, indeed, that her Grace of —, who had been gracefully preparing herself for the honour that awaited her, suddenly looked the other way, as if she supposed the company were expected to move on, without any settled order at all.

How the matter might have ended, had it been left wholly to the decision of his Royal Highness, it would be impossible to say ; for Mrs. Cuthbert, with the steady air of an experienced lady of the court, who knew her place too well to leave any possibility of her going out of it, by a quiet but most decisive movement, placed herself so completely out of his way, that had he turned, and walked in and out through the company to get at her, the operation would have had more the air of an officer seizing upon an evading prisoner, than of the most accomplished Prince in Europe leading a fair lady to her place.

So he threw over his shoulder a meaning glance to his faithful Ly, which said plainly enough, "Is she not afraid of me ?" and then led the little-flattered duchess to the seat of honour.

Lord Lionel Caracole, meanwhile—who was admirably broken in to the task of being useful—offered his arm to Mrs. Cuthbert, who readily accepted it ; and following the second lady—who was also noble—into the dining-room, appeared to have got into a remarkably lively conversation with her gay companion, even before they had reached their places at the table.

As to Mr. Cuthbert, the cold fit of his ague was rapidly coming on him again, but, awed by the presence in which he sat, he resolutely sat about eating his soup, endeavouring to still the painful pulsations of his heart, by telling himself that the same confounded woman who had contrived to get an invitation to dinner, by behaving in the most impertinent manner possible, might, by some means or other which he could not understand, obtain some further favour by continuing in the same course.

But, notwithstanding the very satisfactory nature of this logical meditation, Mr. Cuthbert was very far from being at his ease. The whole thing puzzled him. There sat the Regent,

after inviting his commoner-self and his rustic wife to meet, 'en petit comité,' half-a-dozen of the highest-born people in the land, eating his dinner very heartily, without, apparently, taking any notice of either of them.

And there sat this rustic wife, who either from her country breeding and awkwardness, or from mere obstinacy and disobedience, seemed to forget altogether where she was, and to be amusing herself by laughing and talking to that silly young nobleman, just as if she had come to Brighton to do that, and nothing else.

It was all very unlike what he had expected it would be, and very unlike what he was sure it ought to be; but there was no help for it at that moment, and all he could do was to bear it as well as he could, without letting anybody find out how exceedingly angry and disappointed he felt.

There were also other people puzzled as well as Mr. Cuthbert. The Prince himself, for instance, could not at all understand the altered manners of his beautiful "Pearl." Had she only avoided him, he might have rested peaceably in the conviction that she had taken fright at his increasing attention, and feared to trust herself with him. This would have been extremely natural, and extremely probable; but this could not have converted one of the most unaffected and quiet-mannered young creatures he had ever seen, into one of the most complete flirts whose manœuvres he had ever been permitted to witness.

Yet still, as it was quite incredible that she could intend to affront him, there must be some cause for her conduct which he had not yet discovered. Was it possible that she, too, was longing for the coronet he had been asked for, as vehemently as her husband, and that she was taking this extraordinary way of showing him that he had vexed and disappointed her? It was not very likely, but certainly it was possible; and as he actually had in his writing-desk, returned to him by express that very morning, the document which would enable him to gratify this longing, if she had it, he determined to try the experiment when they should re-enter the drawing-room; and, in the meantime, he turned from the fair enigma to one of those dinners which probably robbed England of her fattest monarch some years before his stout stamina would have given way without them.

Mrs. Cuthbert soon perceived that he had ceased to watch her; and her young and sanguine spirit led her to hope that her work was done. But when her artificial animation was permitted to relax, she felt that she had overtaxed her strength, and that she really was very ill. Her head ached dreadfully, and she felt that she would have purchased the power of

changing the brilliant scene that surrounded her for any darkened bed-room that she might call her own, at a price that no jewel she had ever seen would have been worth, in her estimation.

Lord Lionel looked at her with astonishment. He had begun to think her (on his own account) a most captivating creature ; and, like Don Giovanni's obedient servant man, found the office of making love to her by no means without attraction. But what on earth was come to her now ? Was she really ill ? Or was she only trying some new trick to work upon the feelings of her still but half acknowledged royal lover ? This last conjecture he thought by far the most probable ; and was consoled for the change, by thinking that it was just the sort of thing that it would be pleasant to point out to his royal master.

So he, too, became silent ; and the duchess was sullen ; and the countess was on the wrong side of the table, for the duke was on the other ; and the earl thought the Regent grew more dull and drowsy every day ; and, in a word, there never was that prettiest of schemes, a pleasant little dinner-party, more completely 'manqué' than on the present occasion.

The business, however, came to a conclusion as soon as the Regent had done eating and drinking ; and, to the great relief of Mrs. Cuthbert, the party were promenaded back again into the drawing-room.

The Regent looked heavy, and by no means in the best of all possible tempers ; but the coffee came, and the liqueurs followed ; and then it was that Lord Lionel Caracole, gliding round with that essentially courtier-like step which enables a man to find himself where he wishes to be without anybody's knowing how he got there, stood close behind the broad shoulders of the Prince, and whispered in his ear, "She is disappointed because things do not move on faster. She is trying a new scheme now—look at her !" The Prince Regent did look at her, and was greatly surprised, and certainly a little touched, by the striking change in her appearance.

Mrs. Cuthbert had entered the presence, the very epitome of youth, beauty, elegance, and high spirits ; and now she looked like a drooping lily, that some rude hand had severed from its stalk, leaving it fading and lifeless.

Was it his careless air of indifference that had done this ? Had the flower, the very pine-apple of English gallantry, really brought such a blighting mildew with him ?

For all answer to the communication thus made him, the accomplished Prince whispered in his turn into the ear of his favourite, who immediately withdrew himself from the room ; but, before even the sharp-sighted duchess could say to her—

self, "Where is he?" he returned to his usual post behind his master, and, bending over him—for his Royal Highness was now seated—dexterously placed a paper in his hand, which, as his 'cambric bouquet' was in his own hand at the same moment, passed from the one to the other without being noticed.

And then was seen a spectacle most rare, most marvellous! The Prince Regent, who, at the time of which I am speaking, was scarcely ever seen to remove himself from the seat on which he first deposited his goodly greatness after dinner, till the first hours of digestion were happily past, and who from time to time was accustomed to bless some favoured fair one of his circle by communicating an intimation that she might approach him, now actually rose up; and, walking with almost awful slowness to the distant sofa on which Mrs. Cuthbert had placed herself, bent down, and, laying the paper he held on her knee with one hand, while with the other he gently pressed one of hers, he whispered, "My Pearl must give me one smile for this, and then I shall know she understands me."

But instead of giving him a smile, Mrs. Cuthbert raised her pale face towards him with a look of such painful dismay, and such total absence of everything that could be mistaken for satisfaction, that, had it been at that moment possible, the gracious sovereign would unquestionably have re-possessioned himself of the paper which he had put into her possession, and left her to recover her strangely-ruffled tranquillity as she might.

But such a recovery of the document was no longer possible, for, as the startled lady made a movement intended to withdraw her face from its alarming vicinity to that of her royal host, the paper fell from her lap upon the ground.

To stoop any further was in every sense impossible to the illustrious gentleman, he therefore wheeled about; and, that he might not exactly return to the place whence he had been taken by the unintelligible manœuvres of the beautiful rustic, he skilfully—and gracefully, too, all things considered—moved himself to the place where sat the handsome, pouting duchess, thus succeeding, by dint of his royally-ready wit, in giving to himself the air of making a royal progress, and to her, the return of all the gentlest feelings of which her noble nature was susceptible.

But let it not be supposed that a paper which had once had the honour of being held in the hand of the Prince Regent of England, could be permitted to lie unheeded on the floor, while a little circle of his most faithful subjects looked on with indifference.

Oh, no; there was an instantaneous movement among the gentlemen, who, with more or less alacrity, every one of them

(save Lord Lionel Caracole, who knew better) stepped forward to raise it from its most unsuitable degradation.

Mr. Cuthbert was decidedly the oldest man present ; but, occasionally, there are impulses felt by the aged, of so vehement a character, as, for a moment, to triumph over the effects of time. Dryden wrote his immortal ode in extreme old age ; and Mr. Cuthbert had reached his wife, and taken possession of the paper, considerably before either of the other gentlemen had got near her.

But the effort he had made to obtain this victory occasioned a movement somewhat more strenuous, and less elegant, than is usually witnessed in such a presence, and an air of surprise and curiosity became so visible among the company, that the unhappy Mrs. Cuthbert, having given one frightened look around her, fell back, closed her eyes, and fainted.

Nobody seemed exactly to know what ought to be done. Was any one to take the liberty of ringing the bell for water or any other restorative ? There were decidedly no very affectionate feelings towards the fainting beauty in the hearts of the tall duchess or the fat countess, so they very resolutely kept their places ; and it was this, perhaps, which thawed the somewhat freezing heart of the Regent, just as snow, applied to frost-bitten fingers, restores them to animation. He therefore at once relieved the party from their embarrassment, by saying, "Ring the bell, Lord Lionel, and ask for hartshorn and water. I fear that Mrs. Cuthbert is overpowered by the heat of the room."

And the bell was rung, and the hartshorn and water brought, and the carriage drawn up, and the half-recovered lady conveyed to it and driven home, and all this before her very truly anxious husband could satisfy himself as to the nature of the mysterious paper which lay at the bottom of his coat-pocket.

That he consigned his lovely wife without much ceremony to the care of her waiting-maid was certainly, under the circumstances, extremely natural, and he must not, therefore, be too severely censured, if he snatched the first light he could lay his hands upon, and shut himself into the dining-room, while he examined what his beating heart told him was probably the most interesting document he had ever examined in his life.

It is quite needless to attempt describing the emotions with which he perused it. There it was—he saw it with his eyes—set down in official black and white—his own name—his own—his very own individual self—recorded as John Frederic Augustus Cuthbert, Baron Cuthbert, Viscount Corwyn.

He felt that he had reached the acme of his destiny. The Prince Regent seemed to him, at that moment, to be a perso

of no consequence at all. The deed was done ; the act was consummated ; he was created ; and there he stood, as positively and irrevocably Lord Corwyn, as his friend George was Prince of Wales.

Life cannot, by possibility, have many such moments, and opportunities for accurately watching their effect are, assuredly, rarer still ; to describe them accurately in detail must, for this reason, be rather an effort of imagination than the result of carefully-observant study, and therefore, as being totally out of my line, I abandon it.

Suffice it to say, then, that Mr. Outhbert rose, on the following morning, an altered man.

If the first delicious consciousness of his condition, which flashed upon his memory as he awoke, could have admitted of any augmentation of happiness, it would perhaps have been found in hearing that Lady Corwyn had expired during the night ; but his lordship was too reasonable a man to expect that a whole series of miracles should be wrought in his favour at once, and he therefore felt no emotion at all deserving the name of disappointment, when informed that she was pretty well, but intended to take her breakfast in her own apartment.

And then, as a conscientious monarch might do, on the first day of awaking after his royal functions had fallen upon him, he began to send his thoughts inward, and outward, and above him, (but that was very high, and almost strained his faculties,) and below him, in order to decide in what manner he was first called upon to exert them ; and he recollected with a pang of (unmerited) self-reproach, that as yet not one single individual of his household—no, not even his wife—had been made acquainted with the event which had made him the exalted being that he felt he had become.

He had already half completed the business of dressing when this occurred to him, and, turning himself about, he fixed his noble eyes upon the face of his valet with an expression so unintelligible, that the man ejaculated the word "Sir?" interrogatively, very dutifully wishing to know what it might be that his master wanted. But the man, instead of receiving a command to do this or to do that, (as he expected,) in reply, was more puzzled than ever, by his master's raising his eyes for an instant to Heaven, as if demanding justice of the gods, and then repeating the word "Sir!" with more indignation than any ordinary-minded man would have found it possible to throw into one syllable.

A second instant of reflection, however, convinced the peer that his valet was not to blame, for that ignorance and innocence are sometimes synonymous ; and the next brought the

reflection that it was not then, and that it was not there, (in a little dressing-closet of about eight feet square,) that the first announcement of his rank should be made. He therefore condescendingly bent forward his head, as if he would have said, "Never mind, Wilson, it does not signify," and then, rather hastily finishing his toilet, he left the room, saying, in a tone of considerable solemnity as he did so,—

"I am now going into the front drawing-room, Wilson; order all the servants—all, remember, and Selby included—the coachman, also, if he be in the house—order them all, Mr. Wilson,"—(the word Mr. was here given to his valet very much with the same manner and feeling with which he might have bestowed a cast-off garment upon him)—"order them all, Mr. Wilson, to follow me thither immediately."

Mr. Wilson was a good deal frightened, but he recovered himself sufficiently to reply, "Yes, sir." It would have been quite as well if he had not, for the word "sir" is ever an abomination when addressed to a newly-made peer. But the offence was again forgiven, and the more easily, because the placable nobleman felt assured that it had been committed for the last time. The spirit of obedience, and the spirit of curiosity together, brought the assembled household into the drawing-room almost before the master of it had fully decided in what attitude he should place himself to address them. But there are moments in which inspiration seems to take the place of judgment, and this was one of them.

The late Mr. Cuthbert stationed himself with his back towards the fire-place, which was at the further end of the room, on entering, and, with one hand half thrust into his waistcoat, and the other caressing the various seals (the best was yet to come) appended to his watch-chain, he silently watched the seven servants, of which his marine establishment was composed, enter by single file into the room, and range themselves across the bottom of it.

He waited during one solemn moment, till every movement amongst them seemed hushed, and then he said, "My good friends, it is proper that I should inform you that it has pleased his Royal Highness the Prince Regent of the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, to call me to the upper chamber of the great council of the nation, by creating me a peer. My title is Lord Corwyn, taken from the venerable castle of my ancestors in the principality of Wales. I am Lord Corwyn, my good people, and it has now become your duty carefully to avoid speaking of me by any other name. In addressing me you will, of course, use the customary appellation of 'My lord,' by which, as you doubtless know, all noblemen, not having the rank of duke, are addressed. Your mistress you will always

speak of and address by the title of 'My lady.' Remember what I now say to you, if you please, and never let me hear any of you, from the highest to the lowest, commit the great vulgarity and impertinence of addressing me as 'Sir,' or her ladyship as 'Ma'am.' "

"No, my lord," responded the household, with one voice.

Was it in the nature of things that Lord Corwyn could ever again experience a sensation so delicious as that produced by this first pronunciation of his title? The triumphant blood mounted to his temples. He felt conscious that he was almost overpowered by his emotions, and, with a dignity of feeling analogous to that of Cæsar, when he took care to fall gracefully, Lord Corwyn resolved that he would not be seen to mount with shaken nerves. He bent his head, almost profoundly, on his breast. The signal was understood, the servants retreated, the door was closed, and Lord Corwyn was left alone.

At that moment his own heart was his best companion.

CHAPTER XLV.

To do Mrs. Selby justice, she had never been a negligent attendant upon her mistress, but now she naturally felt a renovated impulse of duty, which led her, ere any bell had summoned her, to present herself at the bed-side of her lady.

Her appearance there, however, was rather *mal-à-propos*, for poor Harriet had just fallen into a refreshing sleep. She had over-taxed her strength, poor thing, on the preceding evening, and her eager wish to fulfil her purpose, together with the struggle and exertion necessary for changing her natural manners sufficiently to effect it, had completely overpowered her.

She had gone to bed not only with the miserably invalided feeling which is sure to succeed fainting, but with too much feverish excitement to permit her getting any healthful sleep during the night; but as the morning advanced, this fever abated, and, if she had been left to herself, nature would soon have restored her to her usual health.

"Oh, Selby! why do you wake me?" she exclaimed, as her too watchful handmaid drew back the curtains of her bed.

"I beg your pardon, my lady, a thousand times, I am sure; but as it is growing so very late, I thought your ladyship might be expecting me."

"No, Selby," replied her mistress, turning drowsily on her pillow—"I did not expect you at all; and you won't give me

my comfortable nap again by calling me 'My lady' and 'Your ladyship.' Do go away, and not make such a goose of yourself."

"I will go away this very minute, my lady, if such is your ladyship's orders; but surely I am not making a goose of myself for giving your ladyship what is your ladyship's due. It is very strange, to be sure, if your ladyship doesn't know it; but, for all that, it is as true as that I stands here before your ladyship's eyes, that you are my lady and your ladyship, and that the Prince Regent has made my master Lord Corwyn."

"And who has told you so?" said her mistress, thoroughly roused by this intelligence.

"My lord, himself, my lady," replied Selby, with great solemnity. "His lordship ordered us all to attend him in the front drawing-room, and when we was there, his lordship stood up, and announced to us all, in the most condescending manner, that he was going to be a councillor to the nation, and was to be called Lord Corwyn."

Lady Corwyn, for so we must now call her, immediately recollected the paper which the Regent had placed on her lap, and which she, poor lady, in her terror and simplicity, had believed must contain a declaration of love; but she now at once divined the truth; and, though somewhat alarmed as to what might be the meaning of this sudden fulfilment of all her husband's hopes, she was greatly comforted by discovering that she had needlessly terrified herself when she supposed that the Regent had so wantonly exposed her to all the dreadful interpretations which must have been put upon his thus silently placing a letter in her hands. She remembered that Lord Lionel, at least, was sure to know what the paper contained, and that a better channel for making the fact public could not be desired. She was provoked with herself for having permitted her fear and indignation to overpower her, as they had done, before the Regent and his chosen circle; and, moreover, she felt a sharp pang at her heart as she thought of the interpretation which her father and Charles Marshdale would be sure to put upon the doubtful honours thus bestowed upon her husband and herself.

Heartily did she wish, poor lady, that she had been earlier and more active in her attempts to repulse and offend the Prince, for then this public confirmation of all the slanders circulated against her might have been prevented! But these regrets were all too late; and all she could do now was to meditate upon what measures could be taken in future, which might most effectually prove their falsehood, notwithstanding this apparent testimony of their truth.

The unhappy viscountess had yet to learn how much easier it is to give birth to slander than to stifle it.

But though her thoughts were now too busily at work to permit her hoping for any more sleep, she felt no inclination to leave her bed, or to put herself in the way of witnessing, earlier than was absolutely necessary, the triumphant satisfaction of her husband at this successful issue of his infamous schemes.

The curtains, therefore, were again drawn round her and Selby was dismissed.

As the waiting-maid had learnt all she was likely to learn from her mistress respecting this great event, which certainly amounted to the astounding fact, that she neither knew nor cared anything about it, she condescended to indulge herself with a little speculative conversation upon the subject with the servants, while they assembled round the breakfast-table in the hall. But she soon found that no new lights were to be hoped for from them, and therefore retreated to the aristocratic shelter of her own apartment, for the purpose of relieving her over-burthened mind by an epistolary communication to the correspondent she had left in Cavendish Square; and she wrote as follows:—

“DEAR SARAH HOUSEMAID,

“I have very extraordinary news to communicate to you, and I shall do it at once, that you may not hear of it first any other way, and so go to suppose that I give myself any airs upon it, on account of the change it of course makes in my own situation. What do you think, Mrs. Sarah, of our master's being made a lord? Perhaps what you may think is that I am telling you a story; but if you do, you are mistaken, for what I say is no more than the truth, and that you will find if you stays where you are till we comes back again. Yes, Sarah Housemaid, our master, Mr. Cuthbert as was, is now Lord Corwyn, called after that awful old castle in Wales that you have heard me tell of. And as our master is made a lord, in course my lady is made a lady—a real lady, you know—and that makes a great difference in all ways, Mrs. Sarah.

“Lady Corwyn's own maid can't in reason be expected to consider herself just exactly the same sort of person as what I was before. My station in life is altogether altered, and now I have a right to be asked to dance by a duke's gentleman,* which could not any way happen before, though I am not that certain but what the Duke of Anderley's gentlen an would have preferred it, if possible. And this being the exact truth, my good Sarah, you must in no ways take it ill if I am not always just that familiar as I used to be. However, I have a very great regard for you, and don't mean to think of giving you up, and you won't quarrel with me for just saying that I wish,

* Fact.

with all my heart and soul, that you could get yourself taught to dress hair, for then something might turn up to put us more upon an equality. And now, my good-girl, having opened my heart to you on this, I will not scruple to go on, almost the same as if nothing had happened in respect to speaking to you about the affairs of my lady. You and I know more about her than most people, I believe, and yet it is just as true as the gospel that she puzzles me still, most unaccountable. I am sure I'd rather cut my tongue out than say a word against her, but for the life of me I can't help thinking as she is playing a very double sort of game between his Royal — ; of course you will understand who I mean, without my being that clear about it ; and as I was saying, I think my lady is playing a double game between the greatest of all gentlemen, and the young fellow that I spied out upon her wedding-day in the church at Penmorris. My lord's gentleman, and indeed all the gentlemen valets in the place, is as perfectly up to the fact as we are, about his Royal —, but that, in course, among people of first-rate fashion, wouldn't and couldn't be no reproach to anybody. There's nothing but the very lowest as can't see a difference between his Royal — and everybody else in the kingdom, and out of it too, for that matter. Talk of Buonaparte, indeed ! But that's neither here nor there, in regard to this other affair, and I'm as sure as that the sun's in Heaven, that there is something going on there that did not ought to be going on. There is one particular thing that I never yet told to nobody, and I am not going to tell you of it now, Mrs. Sarah. Confidence is confidence, and what my lady trusts to me is for me, and none besides me. These was my principles before ever his Royal — had made me own maid to a lady of title, who will have to wear a coronet upon her head when a coronation comes round, and nobody can say how soon that may be. However, Sarah, as to what I was saying, you would think as I do, if you knew all. What can a lady, like my lady, want money so bad for, as to be after pawning the old family jewels to get it ? Tell me that, if you can. I say nothing. I never will say anything, so don't expect it, and never ask me. But don't be affronted at my high and honourable feelings, my good Sarah. It is not upon account of your being a housemaid. If I know my own heart it is not, and I am not at all sure that I should say anything of very great importance more if I was writing to the own maid of a duchess. Good-by, Sarah. Keep in mind what I have said to you about hair-dressing, and believe me, notwithstanding the great reverse in my destiny, your sincere well-wisher,

“ M. SELBY.”

* * * * *

It was not long before Lord Corwyn felt that greatness carries weight with it. He did not very well know what he ought to do about returning thanks to the Regent. If the precious document which had made earth feel like Heaven to him, had been placed upon his knee, instead of upon that of his wife, he fancied that he should have known perfectly well what he ought to do, and have been able to perform it too, without the least embarrassment. But now the case was different. He could not conceal from himself the fact that it was to his skill in choosing a wife that he owed this unexpected mark of royal favour, and he thought that there would be something rather awkward, if not absolutely ridiculous, in his asking permission to present himself alone for the purpose of returning thanks for it.

After maturely considering the subject, therefore, he determined to volunteer no step of the kind till he had received from his wife, who seemed daily growing more alarmingly independent of him, an assurance that she was sufficiently recovered in health to accompany him.

The first time that Lord and Lady Corwyn ever met under their new characters of peer and peeress, was that day at the dinner-table. That she, poor soul, hated and dreaded the sight of her husband more than ever is quite certain; and after her really alarming swoon on the preceding night, she might easily have pleaded illness for keeping out of his way. But this was an expedient she was not inclined to have recourse to.

Notwithstanding the important scene of the preceding evening, she still confidently expected to disprove, in the eyes of all, the vile slander which had been so cruelly thrown upon her name; and, having effected this, her purpose was to live in her own house, whether in town or country, in great seclusion and retirement, which she flattered herself she should be able to effect without great difficulty.

Her worthless husband had now obtained that for which he had so basely laboured while betraying her to the contempt of all—even to that of her own father. He could want no more of her, or rather he could hope no more from her influence at court; for, having once convinced the Regent of the mistake he had made in taking the manœuvres of her husband for her own, it was not very likely that for the future he would show himself very desirous of her presence. And once restored to the good opinion of her father, and of the high-minded young poet who now did her such deep injustice, she fancied that life might still have something less miserable than the last eighteen months, in store for her. When her husband no longer hoped to make her useful, might he not almost forget her? Might she not, again and again, find herself in the

midst of all she loved at Penmorris? At any rate, she would try for it; and if she failed, she would endeavour to teach herself to bear her punishment meekly, only praying God that she might not live very long.

It was in this mood that her ladyship now descended the stairs, upon being informed that the dinner was waiting for her. Her noble husband heard her step as she did so, and threw open the drawing-room door to attend her.

"Are you quite recovered, my sweet love, from the indisposition which seized upon you last night?" said he. "I presume it was caused by agitation very naturally arising from the munificent and affectionate kindness of our royal master. And no wonder, dearest! Never, surely, was any nation blessed with such a Prince as ours! You are aware, my love, that the paper he so graciously placed upon your knee was my patent of nobility? You are aware that I have now the happiness of hailing you as Lady Corwyn?"

The almost shuddering Harriet had already withdrawn the hand he had taken, under pretence of adjusting some part of her dress, and now only answered by a cold inclination of the head.

Lord Corwyn had never before, perhaps, been made so completely aware of the entire change of her demeanour towards him as he was at that moment. The movements she had made were indeed very slight. But there was scorn, scorn, scorn, in the very slightest of them. And there he stood, with his arm rejected, he hardly knew how; his courteous and condescending words unanswered, and his noble self permitted to follow the greatly-changed little Harriet down-stairs, provided he kept at sufficient distance to avoid treading on her dress!

What might this mean?

Was it from the sudden consciousness of the dignity conferred by her new title?

Could he have persuaded himself to think this, he would not only have forgiven, but would have loved her all the better for it. But, "No!—confound her!—no!" was the response which his second thought made to his first, as, with an awful frown upon his brow, he followed her into the dining-room.

And then came crawling into his heart the venomous truth. She understood what he had been about, and she meant to make him pay for his title by forcing him to be aware that she knew how he had obtained it.

When truth once seizes upon any mind, it generally keeps a pretty firm grasp of it, and from this time forth my Lord Corwyn hated his wife with a cordiality that made the sentiment a tolerably active impulse in everything he did.

He could not eat his dinner that day with as much appetite.

as ought to have attended the first dinner at which the servant behind him answered to his first question, "Yes, my lord!" Nevertheless, the words produced a delicious thrill; but the enjoyment was not perfect.

He felt that he had still more work to do.

But he also felt that he was a nobleman, and that, let his low-born wife think, feel, say, or do what she would, she could not turn him into a commoner again.

There was a balm in this thought, and there was something more—there was spirit also. He felt revived as he took his second glass of sherry, and pledged to himself his own noble word that the toy with which he had first amused himself, and then, to his immortal honour, turned to such good account, should not hit him like a billiard-ball on the rebound, but should be pocketed safely in some way or other.

* * * * *

His Royal Highness was a little puzzled, too, and so was Lord Lionel Caracole.

The former fully intended, if he did not forget it, to have the pretty lady again before him, in order to discover what she would be at; and his gay favourite also determined to discover whether the remarkable and very fascinating animation which this same pretty lady had displayed, when he was placed beside her instead of his royal master, arose from a desire to captivate the young or to pique the old.

In the former case he saw no harm, nor any great danger of any kind, in yielding to the fascination just as far as gratitude demanded. He knew his royal master well, and was quite aware that he was much more likely to amuse himself by bringing forward another new beauty into celebrity and high fashion, than to quarrel with him for being ready to take off his hands the task of amusing one of a year's standing, upon whom he was almost tired of heaping honours and renown.

However, neither master nor man were quite sure as yet as to what place Lady Corwyn was to occupy for the next few months, in the illustrious circle to which her beauty had obtained her admittance.

The only person concerned who did not feel any doubtful waverings respecting either the motives or intentions of Lady Corwyn, was the one who had been employed in some sort to watch over her. Charles Marshdale had quite made up his mind on the subject. According to his theory, Lady Corwyn was utterly depraved. She had first endured the degradation of being openly displayed as the mistress of the Prince; and then, having obtained the title at which she aimed, turned from the sovereign to his creature, and indulged her vanity and her vice by again publicly displaying herself as devoted to

him. Her detestable, soul-harassing blandishments towards himself, formed another item in the fearful account against her ; but this one was buried deep in the most secret recesses of his soul ; he turned from the recollection of it with feelings that seemed hovering between terror, regret, and abhorrence.

There were moments, indeed, when he found himself weeping over the recollection of her voice, as he had heard it pronounce his name when he had suddenly appeared before her on the hill ; and the only way that suggested itself to him for conquering such weakness, was the dwelling upon all that he had heard, all that he had seen, and all that he had imagined against her.

This amounted to what was quite sufficient to make him deem it his duty to conjure her father to banish her as much as possible from his thoughts ; and on no account, and under no pretence, to permit her presenting herself and her disgraceful title at Penmorris.

There is hardly any amount of false appearances, or false evidence, that can, to one's heart, acquit a man of blame for committing such an injury as this against a woman as innocent as poor Harriet ; but if reluctance and suffering, on the part of the offender, might be pleaded as an atonement, Charles Marshdale might stand acquitted, for rarely has any man suffered greater mental agony than he did when he wrote the terrible letter which contained this advice.

For several weeks afterwards, he remained in a state of mind which rendered general society absolutely intolerable. He had left Brighton within two hours after his rencontre with Harriet ; but to remain in London was equally impossible, and when he got to Oxford he found it worse still, for every friend he met began by wishing him joy, and ended by saying, " But, my good fellow, how dreadfully ill you look," or something of the kind.

So, after bearing this for a day or two, he set off again ; and soon placed nearly the whole extent of Great Britain between himself and his native village, betaking himself to the Highlands of Scotland, a region by no means so familiar to Englishmen then, as it has become since ; and there passed his dismal hours in writing very wild verses, and taking very wild walks. He certainly believed himself to be as utterly miserable as man could be ; but what would have been his condition had he known that the woman against whom he had barred a father's house and heart, was one of the purest and most innocent of human beings ?

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE Royal Regent adhered to his purpose ; and, what is more, he remembered it. Another invitation, not, however, to dinner (that experiment had too completely failed), was sent to the " Pearl " and her noble spouse, and immediately accepted by both, though for different reasons. My Lord Corwyn was pleased at receiving it ; and was also pleased, to a certain degree, in accepting it. He knew that nobility, so suddenly and so privately bestowed, required the appearance of great personal favour to render it intelligible ; and three invitations to the Pavilion within ten days, had sufficiently the semblance of this to justify a great many of the fine things which he was in the habit of relating to all who would listen to him, respecting the very flattering partiality evinced towards him by the Prince.

But, somehow or other, he had an ominous sort of conviction that this invitation would be the last.

He had not sat watching his determined wife for nothing. He remembered that she had made up her mind to marry him, and that she had done it. He was sure that she intended to affront the Prince, and he was equally sure that she would do that too ; and therefore, as he meant to leave Brighton immediately, these three invitations would make an admirable finale to his share in the history of the court of England.

Had he not got possession of his beloved coronet, everything would have appeared under a different aspect to his eyes ; he would have still clung to the fond hope of obtaining it, and would have continued to entangle his wife in the complex net of simulated affection and connubial authority, in order to sustain that hope to the very last gasp.

But now he was about equally indifferent to the feelings of his wife, and of his sovereign. If the former rebelled, he could lodge her very snugly in Corwyn Castle ; and if the latter kept him at a distance, nothing could be more easy than to hint that " it was in vain for the old Regent to attempt making love to his wife. It had been very difficult to convince him of it, but, thank Heaven, the old gentleman had found it out at last."

Lady Corwyn's submitting to accept this invitation was for the sole purpose of securing the certainty that it should be the last. And in this she succeeded to perfection.

Neither was the Regent unmindful of the fact that he, too, had an object in bringing her there ; and before the evening

was over, he sent an invitation to her to 'occupy the chair beside him ; Lord Lionel was his nuncio on this occasion, and during their walk across the saloon her ladyship failed not to evince her perfect recovery from her recent indisposition, by the spightliness of her manner, and the animated whisper with which she replied to everything he said to her.

Having reached the envied post that was assigned to her, she began the performance of her duties as one of the noble ladies of the court, by looking so earnestly at a picture which hung above the Regent's head, as not to hear a word he said, or even to make it appear that she was conscious he was addressing her.

His Royal Highness looked at her for a moment very steadily, and then almost permitted his royal features to relapse into a little grimace, as he exchanged a glance with Lord Lionel.

Her next manœuvre was to give a suppressed but unmistakable yawn, when the Regent, determined if possible to find out what she was about, turned himself in the most flattering manner towards her, and began narrating to her, actually narrating, a capitally good story, having an epigrammatic conclusion ! But considerably before that conclusion had arrived, Lady Corwyn had yawned a second time ; and then the Regent, having once more given her a steady look, rolled himself round again in his chair, and very openly gave a glance to his favourite, which said, as plainly as a glance could speak, "Take me this woman away, as fast as you can."

And the beautiful Lady Corwyn was accordingly very politely handed into the adjoining room, and when he had got her there, and placed her on a sofa, the gay and frolicsome-looking Lord Lionel prepared to seat himself beside her ; but Lady Corwyn, with an air of authority that really might have sat well upon a queen, held up her hand as if to stop him, saying, at the same moment, "Have the kindness, Lord Lionel Caracole, to return into the saloon, and tell my husband—Lord Corwyn, I mean—that I beg he will come to me here immediately. He must inquire for the carriage, for I am exceedingly tired, and want to go home."

Poor Harriet had now another steady glance to encounter from one who wished to understand her, but could not. Her request, however, was too direct to be evaded, and the young man did very docilely what he was bidden.

And so did my Lord Corwyn also ; and in less than twenty minutes after she had received the last stare from the royal eyes which had so greatly honoured her, she was driving home again to her own house, with her husband beside her, as mute as a fish.

It was long since "little Harry" had felt so comfortable as she did that night, as she lay down in bed.

"I dare say I could have managed it all better, and more civilly, if I had had more experience," thought she; "but never mind! I think my own dear father would have been satisfied, had he watched me. And that is pretty nearly all I care for now."

* * * * *

On the following morning Selby entered her room at an unusually early hour, exclaiming, "Oh dear, my lady! I am feared I shall frighten your ladyship, but my lord has just sent me to say that I must set about packing your ladyship's things this very minute, for that your ladyship and his lordship are going to set off for London on particular business directly."

This news by no means either surprised or displeased Lady Corwyn, though the vehement suddenness of it led her to suppose that his lordship might not be in the most placid of humours. But on this point she was most profoundly indifferent. There is no matrimonial sedative, perhaps, so effectual as real, genuine contempt. Had the newly-made peer stood before Harriet with a drawn dagger pointed at her breast, she could not have condescended to be afraid of him.

She left her bed, however, with very prompt obedience, made a hasty breakfast, and was quite ready to follow the driving-seat and imperial to the carriage a full hour before she was summoned to do so. But, at length, this expected summons came, and on descending the stairs she found his lordship precisely ready to hand her into the carriage, and to follow her himself.

The transit between Brighton and London was not made so quickly in those days as it is done at present; but if it had lasted twice as long as it did, it is not probable that the distance would have been made to appear shorter by means of any conversation between Lord and Lady Corwyn. In fact, neither of them spoke a single word; indeed, her ladyship read very assiduously during nearly the whole distance.

Their unexpected arrival in London naturally created some surprise, and some little confusion among the domestics who had been left in Cavendish Square. But Mrs. Morris, the house-keeper, was not a person very easily discomposed; and had not Lady Corwyn preferred taking tea in her own dressing-room, she might, in a wonderfully short space of time, have shared an excellent impromptu dinner with her noble lord.

The first thing of any very great importance that happened to her ladyship after her return to London was the receiving a joint letter from her mother and Mary, full of joy and grati-

tude for her present, and telling her that good Mrs. Montagu's troubles now seemed all at an end ; for that the tradesmen were paid, and that Mrs. Osterly, though still incapable of speaking, had employed the means Mr. Coleman, the lawyer, had taught her, and had scrawled her cousin's name upon a slate ; since which Mrs. Montagu had scarcely left her day or night, and that, although this was rather a painful life for a person so fond of being in the air as she was, she never for an instant seemed weary of the confinement, but was thoroughly and truly happy in being at last really useful to a relation, who, with all her faults of temper had certainly befriended her. Mrs. Montagu had written all this to her friend Mary while Mrs. Osterly was asleep, as it was thus only they could now hold any intercourse with each other.

This letter from her mother and sister was read and re-read with the deepest delight ; but still her father wrote not, and his lengthened silence wrung her to the heart. It was evident from the delightful tone of her dear mother's letter, as well as from Mary's part of it also, that he had persevered in his resolution of not communicating to either of them the dreadful reports against her which had reached him ; but was it not possible, notwithstanding all she had done to put a stop to this slander, that he might believe it still ?

She had flattered herself that the same informant who had so truly related the facts respecting her ball (though so completely misunderstanding them) might still have had an eye upon her, and that if so, he might, at least, have done her justice.

• In truth, a vague, a very vague sort of suspicion had by this time arisen in her mind, that Charles Marshdale might have been the blundering, though not the false, witness who had reported what he had seen and heard to her father. The more she had meditated upon the subject, the more firmly had she become convinced that what had at first appeared so extraordinary in her old friend's manner towards herself had arisen from his belief in her unworthiness. But she felt almost equally certain that her behaviour to the Prince Regent, when Marshdale had seen her in his presence at Brighton, must have undeceived him, or, at the very least, have given her the advantage of so much doubt in her favour, as, if repeated to her father, could not have failed to soften his heart towards her sufficiently to have induced him to answer her letter.

But still, no such answer came. And then she determined to write again, and tell him without reserve of all she had suffered, and all she had submitted to, before her eyes became opened to the infamous ambition of her husband, and, also, what she had since done to save herself from its consequences.

It was a feverish interval which elapsed between her sending this letter and receiving that which was the reply to it; but it was not a long one, for, exactly as soon as a reply could come, a letter, directed in her father's hand-writing, and stamped with the Penmorris post-mark, was presented to her by Mrs. Selby.

She had not alluded to her change of name and title in her communication to her father, but this letter was directed to the Lady Corwyn, Cavendish Square.

She did not break the seal till Selby was fairly out of the room, and the door shut behind her. She felt as if there were something solemn and sacred in this renewed intercourse between her father and herself, after it had been so cruelly interrupted. But her hand trembled as she held the letter, not only with impatience, but with a strangely-agitating mixture of hope and fear. Yet, why should she fear? Had she ever seen her father harsh to anybody? Then how could he be harsh to her? And, still less, could he be unjust. She had been culpable—oh, very culpable! First, for having acted in opposition to his wishes, so gently—yet so firmly expressed; and next, in so simply permitting herself to have been made the dupe and the tool of her unprincipled husband, when a little reflection, a little common sense, a little common caution, might have saved her from it! But for all that, she would not, she could not, believe that her father would use her harshly. And by this time, Mrs. Selby had replaced the last straggling chair which appeared to her to be out of its place, and then she closed the door, and then Lady Corwyn broke the seal of her Penmorris letter.

Unhappy woman! The first thing that her eye fell upon was her own letter to him—the last letter! the one which had been written with such full confidence in his approval of the decisive line of conduct she had adopted, and with the delightful hope that, as soon as she had honestly confessed to him her repentance for having turned from his wisdom to follow her own folly, he would receive her to his heart, with all his former indulgent gentleness! And this letter was returned!—returned unopened! But there was something more in the blank cover—perhaps he was from home, perhaps they were all from home!

But this delusion did not last long. The other papers enclosed were bank notes amounting to the sum which, with such heartfelt delight, she had sent her mother!

Little Harry had been a very healthy, buoyant-spirited, un-nervous girl when she married; but she had suffered much since, and it had told heavily, particularly upon her nerves—poor shaken young creature! No sooner had her eyes ascertained what these papers meant, and her mind conceived the

full meaning of the whole enclosure, than she fell from her chair upon the floor, and remained thus for many minutes, perfectly insensible.

She was still alone when she recovered her consciousness, but it was some time before she was fully aware that she was so, or could chase away the persuasion that there were many people in the room, who were come there to lead her to prison, or to some sort of condign punishment, because she had been tried for some great offences, and found guilty.

The most painful feature in this sort of dreamy delirium, was the belief that if she could speak she should be able to prove her innocence, but that she had lost the power of articulation, and was condemned because nobody would come to bear witness in her favour.

Fortunately, her head had come in contact with the brass castor of a table near her, and having been severely cut, was bleeding freely. This copious effusion had the salutary effect of changing feelings that might have led to frenzy, into a state of weakness which left her unconscious of all her sorrows.

How long she remained in this condition is uncertain ; but, by a lucky chance, it was old Mrs. Morris, the housekeeper, who first entered the room, and found her lying on the floor, looking very much as if she were already dead, and with the papers which had fallen from her hand, scattered on the ground beside her.

It was, for many reasons, lucky that she was discovered by this old servant, in this deplorable condition, instead of being so found by the far less trustworthy Selby. Mrs. Morris's first care was, of course, to ascertain whether the colourless being at her feet were dead or only fainting. The blood which, although it had now ceased to flow, had welled forth in sufficient quantity to make a very ghastly appearance, both upon her white skin and her dress, greatly helped to reassure her, by proving that both her paleness and insensibility might be accounted for in a manner less terrible than by supposing her dead ; and a further examination confirming the good woman's hopes, she rang the bell for assistance, in order to convey her unfortunate lady to her bed ; taking care, however, before she did so, to conceal all traces of the open cover and its enclosures, which were so evidently the cause of the fall which occasioned the wound she had received.

Of course Mrs. Selby screamed violently upon perceiving the condition of her mistress ; but, this first emotion over, she assisted the housekeeper in laying her on her bed, and then ran down-stairs with orders that one of the men-servants should be instantly dispatched for the medical man who usually attended the family.

This gentleman was a "general practitioner" of high reputation in the neighbourhood, and his restoratives very soon recalled his poor patient to life and suffering. While this process of restoration was going on, Mrs. Morris had replied to his questions by informing him that her mistress had accidentally slipped and fallen, and, coming in contact with the castor of the table, had cut her temple.

This sufficiently explained the insensible condition in which he had found her : for a very considerable quantity of blood had evidently flowed from her head. A short time, however, sufficed to dress the wound, and the lady was left to the care of her waiting-woman, while Mrs. Morris, as in duty bound, took upon herself the office of informing her master of the accident which had happened.

His lordship received the news with great solemnity ; but, as the housekeeper looked keenly at him, and remembered the prodigious fondness with which he had overwhelmed his lady in her presence, little more than one short year before, she could not but think that his feelings towards her had undergone a considerable change.

Nor did his lordship condescend to affect upon this occasion much more than he felt ; for, as he asked himself, "What should he gain by it?"

If anything had been wanting to warm the heart of the worthy Mrs. Morris towards her young mistress, and to have ensured for her the most watchful care and attention, this apathy on the part of the noble lord would have supplied it. But this was very far from being the case.

And here it will be necessary to retrograde a little, for the purpose of explaining to the reader how it happened that old Mrs. Morris, who had been long a servant to her old master, and so lately a servant to her young mistress, felt so much more kindly disposed towards her than towards him.

Yes, Mrs. Morris had been fifteen years in the service of Mr. Cuthbert, but it must be a superficial observer who supposes that the affectionate feeling which is so often found to exist between servants of long standing and the persons whom they serve, is produced by the length of their service alone. The more we know of what is excellent, the more we love it ; but the more we know of what is not so, the more we dislike it. Nevertheless, it often happens that right-thinking, well-tempered servants in possession of places for which they are well qualified, will retain them almost throughout their lives, if they are not interfered with or ill-treated, even though the heads of the establishment may not possess either their esteem or affection.

And so it was with Mrs. Morris. She knew but little of the

real character of her master, and what she did know she did not greatly admire ; but he had found out that she was a trustworthy and excellent servant, perfectly well acquainted with her business, and invariably punctual in the performance of it ; and so they had gone on together for fifteen years, without either having discovered any cause of personal displeasure against the other.

But though poor Harriet had not been her mistress for as many months as the Lord Corwyn had been her master years, the case was widely different. Mrs. Morris was not only a good servant, she was a good woman. The gentle manners of her young mistress had conciliated her liking on her first arrival, and this pleasing impression had not only strengthened, but had been followed by the most cordial admiration and affection, as the excellent qualities of the ill-matched wife developed themselves.

Mrs. Morris was a conscientious Christian, and performed the duties of a Christian, both as to outward observance and inward feeling, well and faithfully. Could she have done any good thereby, she would have given up her situation in order to avoid seeing the ordinary external duties of a Christian so constantly violated as they were by her master ; but, quite aware that her doing this would effect no change in the habits of Mr. Cuthbert, she contented herself with using all the influence she had upon the household ; and upon the whole, had no reason to complain that her efforts were in vain.

But when Harriet—upon finding that her gentleman-like husband laughingly declared himself utterly ignorant of what was to be done in order to her obtaining a seat in her parish church—applied for information to Mrs. Morris, the good woman's heart warmed towards her, and a sort of friendship and kindly feeling commenced between them which had gone on increasing ever since.

Nor was this their only bond of union. Harriet had been brought up with the feeling that it was part of her daily duty to look after, and assist by every means in her power, the poor people around her ; and after she had made acquaintance in the manner above described with Mrs. Morris, she ventured to assume authority sufficient to ask her, whether what was left from the tables, both of masters and servants, was given to a regular set of pensioners, or distributed daily to the people who seemed most in want of it at the moment ?

Mrs. Morris coloured as she replied, "It is not my fault, ma'am, that nothing of the kind is ever done here. Whatever is left, is the property of the cook, and she sells it."

"Oh, Mrs. Morris, that is very wrong !" said Harriet ; "and indeed I cannot suffer it to continue. You must tell the cook,

if you please, that whatever is dressed in this house, and not eaten in it, must be considered as the property of the poor; and I think I must look to you, dear Mrs. Morris, at least just at first, certainly, to find out, in our own parish, proper objects to receive it."

The good housekeeper looked exceedingly distressed, but, after thinking for a moment, answered frankly, "It is anything but pleasant, my dear young lady, to be obliged to tell you, that what you propose is impossible. It seems like corrupting your mind to set about destroying all the excellent Christian notions in which, it is plain, you have been brought up. But there is not a cook in London, ma'am, either woman or man, who would not give up the best place that could be offered, rather than agree to what you propose.

Mrs. Cuthbert felt shocked, and looked disappointed.

"This is very bad hearing, Morris!" she replied; "but I am not so simple as to suppose that I can make new laws in London. But we must try to do something else, my good friend. It won't do to go on sitting in silks and satins, and having such a table spread as I see every day, without turning a single thought towards those who, perhaps at the distance of a hundred yards from me, are shivering for want of clothes, and sick with hunger too, themselves and the helpless children belonging to them! I cannot bear it, Mrs. Morris. I should be too miserable to live on and think that I was never again to do any good to anybody.

This conversation went on for a good hour, and before the end of it the two Christian women had arranged between them a task of no very difficult accomplishment—namely, the finding out in London, persons in distress to whom assistance would be really beneficial.

Mrs. Cuthbert explained to this really confidential servant that she was really and 'bonâ fide' mistress of two hundred pounds a-year, merely to buy her own clothes; and added, that she hoped she should be able to save, at least half of it, to help those who really wanted it, which she certainly could not be said to do herself. An intercourse thus begun was likely enough to go on increasing, both in affection and familiarity; and such was the case here, but, notwithstanding, Mrs. Cuthbert had never yet breathed a word to her good housekeeper respecting her secret troubles.

It was not pride, or any natural reserve of temper, which prevented her doing so, but a truly conscientious averseness to prejudice a servant against a master who had long retained her in his service, and who had therefore, probably, never treated her otherwise than well.

And Mrs. Morris knew her place too well to enter as a vo-

lunteer, upon any theme which it was evidently her mistress's wish to avoid ; but yet good Mrs. Morris saw and heard a great deal that she did not approve. The frequent mention of the Prince Regent's name with that of her mistress grieved her sorely, but never, for a single instant, did it enter her head that such a woman as she knew Mrs. Cuthbert to be, could, by her own good will, make herself talked of as the favourite of any man but her husband.

The simple-hearted, unimpassioned old woman showed herself in this, a much sounder judge of human character than the philosophical poet.

Things, however, were now taking such a turn, that even without the high-pressure effect of an accident, which had caused the housekeeper to instal herself poor Harriet's constant nurse—even without this, it is scarcely likely that they should go on living together much longer without the unhappy Lady Corwyn's being led to seek sympathy and advice from her humble friend ; and accordingly the mutual restraint which had kept them asunder was now very speedily removed.

Their first really confidential conversation was brought about as follows :—For two or three days after the accident, Lady Corwyn was really very ill. She had a great deal of fever, was fearfully sleepless, and more than once during this time talked so wildly, that the medical man began to be afraid that the brain might have received a concussion of which he had not hitherto been aware.

He expressed this opinion to Mrs. Morris, adding, that he thought it would be desirable to call in further advice, and that he should mention his wish to do so to Lord Corwyn before he left the house.

Mrs. Morris, however, had her own theory upon the subject. She had not forgotten the papers she had picked up on the spot where her mistress had fallen, nor that one of them was evidently an unopened letter to her father, whose name, poor Lady Corwyn's long charity talks with her had made perfectly familiar. The handwriting of her mistress was perfectly familiar to her also, and by means of that useful and essentially female faculty of spelling and putting together which Mrs. Morris possessed, in common with most of her sex, she had become convinced that her mistress's present sufferings were not so much the consequence of the fall, as of the emotion which probably caused it.

But Mrs. Morris, having no intention whatever of mentioning her finding these papers, till her mistress should be well enough to receive them from her hands, only ventured to say that she thought her ladyship was a little better and calmer on that day than on the one preceding it, and that

it would be almost a pity to disturb her by the sight of a strange gentleman, when everything seemed to be going on well without it.

The family practitioner hereupon followed the example of Jove and of some other influential personages, and, granting half her petition, suffered the other half to exhale itself into thin air; in other words, he agreed to await till the morrow before he insisted upon calling in further advice, but avowed his determination of seeing his lordship, who was in the library, before he took his leave, in order that he might state to him, with sincerity, his fears that there might be something more the matter than they had at first anticipated.

To this, Mrs. Morris could not reasonably make any objection; and accordingly, the medical gentleman, upon requesting to see Lord Corwyn, was shown into the room where he was sitting.

His lordship heard all that he had to say, with great attention, and then replied, "If I understand you rightly, sir, you think that her ladyship is very seriously ill?"

"I certainly do, my lord," was the reply.

"And you do not feel quite certain that you understand the nature of her case?"

"No, my lord, I do not."

"Permit me to ask you, sir," said his lordship, with an air of considerable interest, "whether you think it possible that any of the symptoms which seem to set your skill at defiance may proceed from there being any likelihood that Lady Corwyn may be in the way to increase her family?"

Had the medical practitioner been a man in perfectly easy circumstances, and without either wife or children to care for, he would probably have laughed outright; but, as it was, he only replied, "No, my lord; I do not see any reason for supposing that such is the case."

"You feel capable of speaking with confidence on this subject?" returned his lordship.

"Yes, my lord, I do."

"Then, sir, I will wish you good morning; and should you, either to-morrow, or next day, or any following day, desire to call in further advice, I shall not make any objection to your doing so."

These last words were evidently intended by his lordship as the conclusion of the pre-ent consultation; his visitor, therefore, made a low bow, and retired.

The morrow proved that Mrs. Morris had watched her dear lady's symptoms very carefully, and had drawn a correct inference from them. She slept tranquilly for several hours

during the night, and awoke refreshed ; nor did she show any further symptoms of delirium.

Her recovery, from this time, went on steadily, and without any relapse ; but the fair temple, though it healed rapidly, was likely, as the medical man confessed, to be marked by a prominent scar ; “but, most fortunately,” he added, addressing himself to Mrs. Morris ; “it will not in any way be injurious to her ladyship’s beauty.”

“If her precious life and reason be saved, sir,” returned the good woman, “there is nobody but will think she has got beauty enough left, even if the scar was twice as big as it is.”

That poor Lady Corwyn fared the better for having such a nurse as Mrs. Morris is quite certain ; but there was one very important ill consequence attending it ; her own maid Selby became most furiously jealous, and certainly the more so, because, as she said, “It was particularly hard to have her missis taken out of her hands that fashion, just at the very time as she was made a real lady worth waiting upon.”

Had Lady Corwyn been fully aware of the feeling of resentment which she thus excited, she would probably have made her preference for the attendance of the old housekeeper less apparent ; but it really never occurred to her ; and as her strength returned, and permitted her to sit up a little, she constantly made Mrs. Morris sit also ; and the too obvious appearance of familiar conversation which both Selby and her still intimate friend, “Sarah Housemaid,” perceived during their occasional visits to the room, generated a multitude of very injurious suspicions against both the unfortunate lady and her confidante. Of this, however, they were both perfectly ignorant, and perfectly unsuspecting ; Lady Corwyn had certainly found a degree of consolation from this intercourse with her housekeeper, which nothing else within her reach was at all capable of giving her.

On the second day after the invalid had been permitted to leave her bed, she had sat silently meditating on some painful thought, till the tears fell from her eyes, and dropped upon the rigidly-clasped hands that were pressed against her breast.

“My dear, dear lady !” said Mrs. Morris, mournfully—“this is not the way to gain strength. You have got some thought that lies too heavy at your heart, and glad would I be if I could take it upon my own instead !”

“My dear, good woman !” returned her mistress, “I do indeed believe that you would do all you could to help me. But God forbid that I should ever make any one suffer, as I.

suffer myself! There is a great comfort, though, Morris, in knowing that I can trust you—and why should I not take advantage of it? Tell me, then, my kind friend, did you not find papers lying near me when you came in, and saw me stretched upon the ground?"

Mrs. Morris took the key of the little work-table drawer from her pocket, and placing the table within reach of her mistress's hand, put the key in the lock, and then employed herself in arranging something or other in the most distant part of the room.

Lady Corwyn unlocked the drawer, and found in it the cover directed to herself, the bank notes, and her own unopened letter to her father.

"Do not go away from me, Mrs. Morris," said she; "I would rather have you near me."

These words brought the housekeeper to her side in a moment.

"Nobody, then, has seen these papers but yourself, Morris?" said she.

"Nobody, my lady," replied Mrs. Morris.

Lady Corwyn sat for a moment with her eyes fixed on her own letter, and then said, "It would be a great comfort to me, Morris, to tell you what it is that has made me so miserable, and I cannot help thinking that I may tell it to you, without doing anything wrong, though I know quite well that in most cases such an exposure could not be made without great impropriety; but I am so very, very much alone!—so very very completely without a friend in the world!"

And as she spoke, her tears again flowed plentifully.

And tears filled, and more than filled, the eyes of Mrs. Morris also. It would indeed have been difficult to find a more interesting, a more touching object, than Lady Corwyn at that moment—so pale, so beautiful, so young, and with a look of such settled misery on her innocent face, as might have drawn tears from a stone.

"It may not be possible for me to offer you advice as to this, my dear lady," replied the good woman; "but I had a daughter once, and I don't think I would have done more to comfort and save her, than I should be ready to do now for you."

"Oh, no! I cannot be doing wrong now!" said Lady Corwyn, eagerly, as she met the kind, earnest eye that was fixed on hers. "But wrong it would be did I throw from me a comfort that seems sent to me from heaven."

And then, in a still low voice, which seemed to be thus modulated partly from weakness and partly from caution, lest her strength should fail before she had told all, the unhappy

lady recounted to her humble friend the whole narrative of her wilful marriage, and all that had followed since.

During the history of the courtship, of the opposition of her family and her own steadfast resistance to it, the good woman looked very grave, and more than once shook her head in a manner that very plainly indicated her disapprobation. There was no trace of pity on her countenance, but her brows were slightly knit; and it was easy to read something very like, "It is all your own doing, then," on every feature.

But when the pale relator went on to describe the language used to her by her husband after her first appearance at court; his strong exhortations on the subject of loyalty; his assurances that it was her bounden duty to devote herself to her sovereign whenever he benignly condescended to permit it; and then the base trickery with which he had beguiled her to expose herself to the very worst constructions, by the bare-faced coquetry of her conduct and appearance at her own ball, the worthy housekeeper became the colour of a full-blown peony; indignation flashed from her eyes, and she exclaimed, with a vehemence that it was impossible to restrain, "THE MONSTER!"

Lady Corwyn looked greatly exhausted; but her narrative could not end there. She had now, however, documents that might speak for her. Making a sign to Mrs. Morris to place before her the writing-table, she unlocked it; and drawing from its deepest recesses her father's terrible letter to her, and the copy of her answer to it, she placed them in the good woman's hands, saying, "Read these, Morris, and I will tell you the rest."

While the housekeeper obeyed her, Lady Corwyn lay back in her chair, and closed her eyes; and so sunk, so death-like was the look of her face as she did so, that when her pitying companion raised her eyes from the letters, after finishing the perusal of them, and beheld her thus, she uttered a cry of terror, for she truly thought, during one dreadful moment, that she was dead.

This cry caused the unhappy Harriet to open her eyes. "What is the matter, Morris? Is any one coming?" she said, with a look of alarm.

"No, my dear lady—no! But you look ill! You have spoken too much. You must lie down now," said Mrs. Morris.

"I cannot lie down, Morris, till I have told you all; and when that is done, I shall be better—I am quite sure I shall; and the being tired will only make me sleep the sounder."

Lady Corwyn then continued her narration, which retrograded again, to tell of the promise she had besought from her

mother before they parted, relative to the asking her for money whenever she might chance to want it, and of her having, at last, received a letter from her, written in a manner which showed she was still completely ignorant of the dreadful statement which had been made to Mr. Hartwell.

And then she told her sympathizing listener of the dismay with which she had discovered, after she had sent nearly all the money she had to her mother, that her husband had left the heavy debt contracted with the milliner for her to pay.

"I am almost glad that your ladyship had it not in your power to pay it," said the greatly disgusted old woman. "The throwing this little embarrassment upon you, was but a small addition, perhaps, to all that had gone before, but yet——"

"As it happened," resumed Lady Corwyn, "the embarrassment was not a little one at the moment; for the poor Frenchwoman was in such great want of the money, that I felt compelled, by pity, as well as by honour and honesty, to find it for her; and, by the help of Selby, I did find it."

"By the help of Selby!" said the housekeeper, looking uncomfortable. "How could Mrs. Selby find the money?"

"Upon my word, I hardly know," returned her mistress. "But it was necessary," she said, "to permit the person who lent it, to have the keeping of some of my jewels, as a proof that I meant to pay him again."

The usually pale complexion of the worthy housekeeper suddenly changed again, in a very remarkable manner; in fact, her whole face, forehead and all, became of a deep red.

"Is it possible that the girl persuaded your ladyship to pawn your jewels, in order to pay the dressmaker?" said she.

"Pawn, Mrs. Morris?" returned Lady Corwyn, her own pale face seeming faintly to reflect the blush of her companion—"pawn my jewels?"

"My poor, dear lady!" replied the good woman, looking at her with the tenderest interest and compassion, "I was quite sure your ladyship could not understand the nature of the transaction. Selby must have behaved very, very ill."

"But I do understand the nature of the transaction," said Lady Corwyn, earnestly; "and I must assure you that Selby has not behaved ill at all. I have heard, when I was almost a child, of the misery and disgrace into which poor people got by pawning their goods; and though I certainly do not exactly know how this is done, I feel quite sure that it cannot be in the way Selby got this money for me."

Mrs. Morris shook her head.

"Has your ladyship got any duplicate—any paper from the person who has the custody of your jewels?"

"No," said Lady Corwyn, "I have not; but I remember that

Selby said she would take care to get a proper receipt for them."

"It will be very easy to set it all right, my lady," rejoined the housekeeper, frightened at perceiving that what she had already said had made her mistress looked flushed and feverish; "and I thank you, most humbly and dutifully, for the confidence you have placed in me. There is no need for my taking the liberty of telling your ladyship what I think of the terrible history I have been listening to; but I can't let you lie down, my dear lady, without just saying, that I think your ladyship's troubles may be very soon brought to an end."

"Oh, Morris!" ejaculated Lady Corwyn, with a heavy sigh, and a languid smile.

"That is, the worst part of them, my lady," resumed the housekeeper. "I do not mean that any person who has had the misfortune, or imprudence, to make an unsuitable marriage, can hope to be as well off, and as happy, as if they had not done it—nobody can hope for that. But if I understand your feelings rightly, my lady, the thing that pains you most is the being misunderstood, and misjudged, by your own dear honourable father; and that surely can be set right very easily."

"Make me think *that*, my dear, dear Morris, and you will see how right you are, as to all the rest!" cried Lady Corwyn, raising her clasped hands and beautiful eyes to Heaven, and looking neither dead nor dying, but absolutely radiant with happiness, from the new-born hope which the good woman's words had inspired.

"But how, how is it to be done?" she added, despondingly, holding up her own unopened letter.

"Two heads are said to be better than one, my lady," replied the old woman, with an encouraging smile; "and two people can often do what one person cannot; but I must think a little more about it, before I can pretend to advise; and I will think about it a little, and not very much of anything else, till justice is done you, as far as thoughts go. But the first thing, if you please, my lady, is for your ladyship to lie down and go to sleep as soon as this draught is swallowed, and when you wake up, your ladyship shall take a little of the jelly that I have been making, with my own hands, from beginning to end, so I know what it is good for."

Lady Corwyn again looked smilingly up to the kind eyes that were so anxiously watching her, and then stretching out her hands towards her, she held up her sweet face so obviously to receive a kiss, that it was quite impossible the respectable feelings of the old housekeeper could interfere quickly enough to prevent her getting it; and, as the good woman's arms, in utter defiance of all propriety, were tenderly pressed around

her, she felt more like the happy "little Harry" of former days, than perhaps she had ever done for a single moment since the hour of her marriage.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AND how was my Lord Corwyn passing this interval? The first few mornings after his return were divided between his coachmaker, his club, and the park.

With the first he spent a few very happy hours in arranging everything relative to the introduction of his coronet on every part of his harness, and in choosing the form and style of the shield upon which his arms were to be newly blazoned on his carriages.

At his club, his enjoyment was much less perfect. He failed not to go there exactly at the hour, each morning, when he was most sure of meeting a large number of members, in order that he might enjoy the exceeding happiness of hearing himself addressed, again, and again, and again, as "Lord Corwyn." And he certainly did hear himself so addressed; but, somehow or other, it was neither in the very congratulatory, nor in the very respectful manner, which he had anticipated; and had it not been that, in almost every case, he accounted for the sort of indifference which offended him, by supposing that it arose from a feeling of envy at the very signal mark of royal favour which had been bestowed on him, he would not have borne it so well as he did.

But in the park it was worse still.

It was in vain that, day after day, he put out his horse to overtake one man, and drew it in again, to wait for another; nobody, by some strange chance or other, ever would ride side by side with him for two minutes together. Once, indeed, when three or four of the order of persons he most wished to propitiate, happened to receive him as he was advancing towards them, they seemed to form themselves in line, as it were, and came up to him at a hand gallop.

These persons, who were of the class to sympathize with Lord Lionel Caracole in thinking that the sight of such a man as Cuthbert, at the moment of his obtaining the reward for which he had been so nobly anxious, had something "nice" in it, stopped his new lordship for several minutes, and at first his pleasure was as great as his surprise at this; but ere long there was something in the look, or the tone, with which his new title was repeated along the line, which caused him to turn his

horse's head towards Grosvenor Gate, which flanked him on the left, and, after a slight salute to the party, he rode home, in as disagreeable a state of mind as it was well possible for a new-made lord to be in.

As he crossed the hall, in order to reach the library, which was his usual sitting-room, he met Mrs. Selby, who was in the act of weeping rather violently.

Selby was a very well-looking, and a very civil abigail, and certainly considered herself as rather a favourite with her master ; but upon this occasion at least this belief might have been somewhat shaken, for he gave but one scowling sort of glance at her tears, and was then passing on, when it occurred to him that probably she was crying because her mistress was worse.

His lordship had ridden very slowly from Grosvenor Gate to Cavendish Square, and had occupied himself on the way in meditating very profoundly on the best manner of teaching his fine friends to treat him with proper respect.

It was too late in the season to think of doing anything very effective in the way of party-giving—at least, in London. But might he not look about for a furnished villa on the banks of the Thames, and, by giving a series of the most costly public breakfasts that had ever been produced, get himself and his taste so talked of, as to drown all other talk about him? Besides, the Prince Regent would certainly not be invited, and the giving many fêtes that were evidently not intended for him, would be likely to throw into oblivion the one that was.

And there was another way, too, which he did not think of now for the first time, by which he was very sure that his consequence in society would be increased ; and this was by getting rid of his wife. She had, in truth, "outlived his liking" in every way. He had married her chiefly because she was docile and adoring, and she had ceased to be either. Another reason for the rash act was the hope of an heir to his property ; and here, too, he had been disappointed ; and now, when he had not only an estate, but a coronet to bequeath, he could not but feel this the more heavily.

But the stubborn question was, "How was he to get rid of her?"

There were but two ways—death, or divorce—and, unfortunately, as he thought, neither of them were exactly at his command. The apothecary's hints about a fractured skull had certainly given birth to a rambling train of ideas, which, for the most part, were far from being disagreeable ; but he had heard no further allusion to this fractured skull, nor to any other element likely to place him again among the eligibles—

position which, since his *creation*, he had felt himself peculiarly well calculated to fill.

The sight of Mrs. Selby's tears, however, almost instantly revived his hopes. "Fractures so often remained unknown for weeks, and yet proved fatal at last!"

So, after he had passed his lady's waiting-woman, he turned back again, and called to her. "Come here, Selby; step into the library—I want to speak to you."

The girl obeyed without, either reluctance or delay, for her heart and her head were particularly full at that moment, and she felt it would be a great comfort to speak to her master.

"What are you crying for, my good girl?" inquired his lordship, kindly condescending to lay his hand lightly on her shoulder. "Is your lady at all worse?"

"No, my lord, not at all worse—quite the contrary, I believe."

Now, there was something in the tone of this reply that excited the attention of his lordship, and therefore, though the purport of it was not particularly agreeable to him, he was again very condescending, and rejoined, with something less than half a smile, "What do you mean by quite the contrary, Selby?"

"Why, my lord, it is a thing that I didn't ought to dare to trouble your lordship about, but if you will make me speak, my lord, I must tell of it, for if one must speak, in course what is most upon the heart will come out first."

"Well then, speak it. What is it you have got upon your heart?" said Lord Corwyn.

"My lady's treatment of me, my lord. Never was a lady's maid so treated before, I believe, since they was first invented."

"Why, what has her ladyship done to you, Mrs. Selby?"

"Done, my lord? Why, she has treated me exactly like the dirt under her feet. I'll make bold to say that I've been as faithful a servant to her ladyship as ever lady had—too faithful, only too faithful; that is all as I have got to reproach myself with; and now she has just kicked me away, as if I was a bit of mud in her path; and she wont speak to me, nor look at me, any more than if I was the lowest kitchen-maid in the family; and she has taken your lordship's none-too-good old housekeeper to be her intimate friend and adviser; and who shall say what they'll put their heads together to do next—not that I want to know, goodness be praised!—I have seen enough already, and overmuch, Heaven forgive me!"

"What does all this mean, Mrs. Selby? Sit down, do, just for a minute, and tell me what it is all about."

This unexpected condescension seemed to make its way to the 'larmoyante' damsel's heart in a moment. "And that is

treating me, my lord, as a true-hearted servant ought to be treated, if great people knew the value of real faithfulness," she replied: "not that I am one to take advantage of such generosity," added the judicious young woman, supporting herself upon the back of the chair to which his lordship had pointed, instead of rashly seating herself in it—"I know myself, and what I owe to your lordship, a deal better than that; but yet, I can't but say, my lord, that if one did ought to sit down before another, in the company of your lordship's lady, that one ought to be her own maid, who, Heaven forgive me! has only been too faithful to her, and not such a canting, hypocritical old creature as Mrs. Morris."

"But what do you mean, my good girl, by being too faithful to your lady? How can you have been too faithful to her?"

"And that is a question," replied Selby, "that nothing should ever have made me open my mouth to answer to the highest lord in the land, if so be as my lady had only treated me as she ought to have done. But there is nobody can say what they may be driven to by ill usage, till they are tried."

"I believe that is very true, Selby—very true indeed," replied his sympathizing lordship, adding, quite affectionately, "but it seems that you have been tried, and therefore you may speak out with a safe conscience; and it may be, Selby, that you may not find everybody as ungrateful to you as her ladyship seems to have been."

"Oh, my lord! it is from no fear of that as I should hold back, but it is a trouble, my lord—a great trouble, to a good and faithful servant, to find herself forced, as one may say, by what she owes to herself, to say things that she never had it in her thoughts to say till she was too much aggravated to hide it any longer; and since I have said that much, my lord, I don't see no use, and, indeed, nothing but mischief, in not opening my poor overloaded heart at once."

And then the deeply offended lady's maid began at the very beginning, told how she had seen an exceedingly handsome young man hiding himself in church at the time of his lordship's marriage, and then darting out of it, the moment the ceremony was over, in the most terrible agitation; and how her lady had taken on after the marriage that ought to have made her so happy, and so proud; and how, of late, she had got worse and worse in her weepings and moanings; how she had got her to pawn some of the family diamonds for her, without ever giving her a reason for it, good, bad, or indifferent, excepting that she wanted to pay away the money, and how she had found out for certain sure, that her ladyship had had money from the bankers just before, and must have given it away, to somebody or other; the very day after she had got hold of it, because when

one of the poor, beggarly people as she was for ever letting come up into her dressing-room, came the very day after to ask her for money to help pay her rent, she took out her purse, and gave her four shillings and sixpence, "I think it was," added the accurate Selby, "saying, 'That is all I can give you now, for I really don't happen to have any more about me,' or something like that," and afterwards, when the woman was gone, how she took up her empty purse that was lying upon the table, and, laughing like, as she looked at it, put it into what used to be her money-drawer, but without taking the trouble to turn the key.

Here Mrs. Selby paused, partly for the purpose of taking breath, and partly because she was frightened at the look of inveterate wickedness, if such a phrase may be permitted, which had been creeping, as it were, over the features of her master from the time her tale began, and which by this time made him look more completely diabolical than it was comfortable to contemplate.

His eye being steadily fixed upon her, however, he perceived the effect he had produced, and, immediately assuming one of his blindest smiles, he said, "If you see me look cross at what you tell me, you must not fancy that I am angry with you, my dear, good Selby; on the contrary, I feel all that I owe you for your honourable and most praiseworthy sincerity, and, however I may look, I will soon prove to you by my actions, that you have gained a friend worth having."

Cheered and encouraged by this well-timed address, the jealous waiting-maid went on to detail her mistress's scheme, as she called it, for getting rid of her when she got up "as soon as it was light almost" at Brighton, and how she had seen her returning from a two-hours' rambling over the hills with just the very same young man, and no other, that she had seen hiding himself in the church at Penmorris.

Here she paused again, and, by way of giving her narrative an eloquent finale, once more raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and appeared to weep violently.

Lord Corwyn remained silent for a short space, as if to give time for any further particulars which might follow this burst of sensibility; but perceiving that the tale was come to a conclusion, he began a short cross-examination more for the purpose, as it seemed, of eliciting further particulars, than from any doubts as to the truth of what had been stated.

The point on which he appeared to think it most likely that his informant had either blundered or exaggerated, was concerning the pawning of the family diamonds; but here he found her fully prepared to give him all the proof he could possibly require, for, within two minutes after his saying that he

thought there must be some little mistake about that, the active Mrs. Selby had left the room, and returned to it with the pawnbroker's duplicate in her hand.

All that passed between them further on this occasion was his giving, and her receiving, a five-pound note, together with the reiterated assurance that he considered her conduct as most highly honourable and praiseworthy, and that she should find that it had gained her a friend for life.

Not more than an hour had elapsed after this interview had come to a conclusion, before the following short, but pithy epistle was written, signed, sealed, and delivered to a confidential servant, for the purpose of being committed to the post. It was addressed to Mr. Hartwell, and ran thus :—

“SIR,

“Your daughter Harriet, whom I condescended, under a most unfortunate delusion, to make my wife, on the 29th July, A.D. 1811, has scrupled not to give to me, and to many others, the most decisive proofs of being utterly unworthy to hold this honourable position—nay, I think it better to tell you, at once, that I have most amply sufficient testimony of her having been false to her marriage vows, to enable me to obtain a release from mine, by the laws of my country. After stating this, it may appear of small importance to add that I have the most positive proof, also, of her having pawned a portion of my family jewels, for the purpose of relieving the necessities of one of her lovers. But such is the case, and I have in my hands the pawnbroker's duplicate, in proof of the transaction. Such being the well-known facts relative to your daughter, sir, I conceive that you can feel no objection in delivering up to me all papers and parchments relative to her marriage settlement ; you must be aware that they can no longer be of any value to you or to her.

“I am, Sir, &c. &c.

“CORWYN.

“P.S.—In order to prove to you that her depravity had commenced before she became my wife, it may be as well to state that I have the most unquestionable proof that one of her early lovers was concealed in the church during the marriage ceremony, and was then seen to rush out of it in great agitation. This man has been lately seen, wandering about with her among the wild downs near Brighton, soon after daybreak.”

* * * * *

The receipt of this terrible letter so completely overpowered the unfortunate Mr. Hartwell, that he burst into a passion of weeping, and sat with the fatal document spread wide open

before him on the table, his eyes closed, the hard-wrung tears running down his aged face, and sobs so audible bursting from his bosom, that his wife and Mary, who were in the act of entering the house by the passage from the garden, heard the unwonted sounds, and rushed together into the room.

Any further attempt at concealment, on the part of Mr. Hartwell, seemed to be equally futile and unwise. The old man heard them enter, and giving a piteous look into the face of each, pointed to the letter on the table, again closed his eyes, and then awaited the effect of the venomous poison which those he best loved were imbibing from it, with a stillness like that of death.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

It was doubtless very natural that at that moment Mr. Hartwell should have thought more of the unfortunate mother of Harriet than even of her sister. It was to the face of his poor wife that he raised his eyes when at length he had the courage to uncover them, and it was her hand that he snatched, and wrung convulsively, as he waited for the first words that should comment on their misery.

But there was one who, at that terrible moment, needed more watching than even the heart-stricken mother; poor Mary, after a vain effort to reach a chair, lost her senses, and fell fainting at the feet of her parents. And then it was that her unfortunate father remembered that she was in no condition to bear such a shock as the sight of that letter had given her.

A few hours brought what seemed to be the only addition that the misery of the unhappy Hartwells could receive. How they dreaded the return of her happy, gay-hearted husband. How they dreaded the sight of his father, after he should have learned the sad history of the blight which had fallen upon the hope he had welcomed so joyously. How they dreaded to see the quiet happiness of Susan crushed and quenched by all this misery and disgrace—and how, more than all the rest, did they dread to look at the woe-stricken Mary herself, so lately the very type of innocent happiness and hope, and now, health, joy, hope, all blasted together, and the gentlest, as well as the earliest affection of her loving heart converted into bitterness and shame!

The close union of the two families, which till now had appeared to double all the joys of each, already seemed to have an influence very nearly the reverse. The Hartwells could not

think of the Marshdales without feeling that the marriage of Godfrey and Mary, which they used to delight in thinking had done much towards elevating the "standing" of their dear friends in the estimation of the neighbourhood, was now felt to have brought upon them indelible disgrace ; and the Marshdales were so painfully conscious of the same fact, that they feared to look in the faces of their afflicted friends, lest they should themselves betray all that was torturing their hearts.

Nor had either family such comfort as may be found in a perfect unity of opinion and feeling among themselves. Mrs. Hartwell, though as yet she had said little or nothing about it, had thoughts working within her which differed greatly from those which occupied her husband and Mary ; while Susan Marshdale as essentially differed (but, like Mrs. Hartwell, she differed in silence) from her father and her brother Godfrey.

The first occasion upon which this silence was in any degree broken, was on the part of Mrs. Hartwell, and occurred upon her husband's drawing forth, from a drawer in his little study, the large packet, tied with red tape, containing poor Harriet's settlement, and all its appurtenances. Mr. Hartwell uttered a groan as he held the packet in his hand, and then sought and found a large wrapper, and also "quantum suff." of packthread to envelope the whole.

And he did envelope it ; and having done so, he took a pen, examined its nib, found it to be firm, and then employed it to write in a large, old-fashioned, but very clear clerical hand, "For the Lord Corwyn, Cavendish Square, London ;" and when he had finished, he pushed it to a little distance from him, but said not a word.

His wife, who was as usual sitting opposite to him at their common writing and reading table, watched all those proceedings in silence, till the business was completed, and then she said, "You mean to comply with Mr. Cuthbert's requirements, then ?"

"To be sure I do," he replied, looking almost sternly at her ; "do you doubt it, Mary ?"

"I certainly should not doubt it, Henry, if I supposed—that is, if I believed that you thought his letter implicitly to be trusted," said she.

"Oh, Mary—Mary ! what weakness there is in the idle doubt those words appear to express ! But, once for all, my dear unhappy wife, let me warn you—let me entreat you, rather—to banish from your mind everything approaching to such a lamentable delusion ! Rather than see you indulge it, Mary, I would, for the first time in my life, reprove you with harshness, and tell you that, let it arise from what feeling it

may, the wish to screen vice from the obloquy that is its due, must ever be accounted sinful."

Mrs. Hartwell was silenced, but she was not convinced, or, if she were, it was after the manner that Hudibras (as I think) speaks of—

"Those who're convinced against their will,
Are of the same opinion still."

And most surely she remained of the same opinion as before her husband had made the speech above quoted.

"When Joe goes to the village to ask for letters," said Mr. Hartwell, "let him take this packet to the coach-office, and tell him to pay twopence for seeing it booked."

And having said this, the heavy-hearted vicar set forth upon a walk to the furthest part of his parish, in order to visit a poor sick man, who had begged to see him.

Mrs. Hartwell was left alone, with the packet before her eyes, and the image of her little Harry in her heart. She soon fell into a deep, deep reverie; so deep that all things present seemed to pass away, and things that were gone for ever took their place. It was not only her little Harry, such as she had been when grown up, but such as she had been when a little, little child—and then came what she had been when a bigger child—and then what she had been as a great girl—and as these living pictures passed, as if in review, before her, the tears ran unheeded from her eyes.

But suddenly, very suddenly, she ceased to weep, and her features gradually took the fixed expression of deep and earnest thought. How long this lasted, she could not herself have told, but it was not a very short time, though it did not seem long; because, if not positively feeling happy, she was in some sort unconsciously in that enviable condition; for, as she thought and thought, remembered and remembered, reasoned and reasoned, a most wonderfully strong conviction came upon her, that not one single word in all Mr. Cuthbert's letter (how he would have hated her could he have known that she still always called him Mr. Cuthbert in her heart!) was true.

Her heart and her reason together told her that it was impossible.

The creature that she had watched so closely, from birth to womanhood, could not thus suddenly have changed its nature, from all that was good to all that was bad. The thing was, strictly speaking, morally impossible. And she was the more sure that she was right, because she remembered all her little vanities—her infant airs and graces—and her fanciful enthusiasm for the unknown elegancies of life. She remembered all

this, and knew full well that of such fancies was formed the whirlpool in which she was at last engulfed.

But this, though it might account for her marrying old Mr. Cuthbert, could not account for her having had lovers before her marriage, with whom she kept up an infamous connection afterwards.

Where was that fervent feeling of piety which had been conspicuous in her, even from childhood? Where the spontaneous purity of mind, which made her turn with abhorrence from every allusion to vice? Where was the tenderly loving nature that would enable her to endure heat, cold, fatigue, hunger, thirst, in the service of father, mother, or sister? And how came that other sort of strength, which had given her power to stab them all to the heart by a single blow?

The expression of Mrs. Hartwell's features gradually relaxed as she thought of all this, till they assumed the most bland and amiable look imaginable; and then she rose up very quietly from her chair, took the large brown paper parcel in her arms, walked up-stairs with it, and then into her own bedroom, upon entering which, she bolted the door, and pushing a table close to a very high set of double drawers, which adorned one side of the room, she got upon the said table by the help of a chair, and then very dexterously threw up the parcel, so as to lodge it where no eye could observe it.

This done, she entered poor Mary's little drawing-room, where she was sitting, still looking very pale, and engaged in a task that was melancholy enough, namely, the withdrawing from her work-box and work-table all traces of the needle-work upon which she had been of late so happily engaged.

It ought to be mentioned, perhaps, in order fully to explain the vast difference between Mr. Hartwell and his wife, in their manner of receiving the statements made to them against the child that they certainly both loved with equal affection, that Lord Corwyn's dreadful statement had to the wife no confirmation at all; while to the husband it was supported by the evidence of one most thoroughly well known, and most justly looked upon as incapable of wilfully falsifying any fact.

But no individual of either the Marshdale or Hartwell families had ever heard a syllable of Charles's communication.

The vicar had most solemnly promised him to repeat his statements to none, save the unhappy being who was the subject of them, and who might haply have been saved, as they both hoped, from falling lower still, by a remonstrance from her father in the first instance.

Mrs. Hartwell sat down by her daughter with a look so much

more tranquil than poor Mary had seen her wear since the miserable morning that was remembered by them all as being the last of their happiness, that she carefully concealed all traces of her own sad employment, and said, "My dearest, dearest mother, you do not look so ill as you did yesterday. Take care of your health, my precious mother. Oh! what would become of us if you were to be really ill?"

"I do not think I shall be really ill now, my dear child," replied Mrs. Hartwell, kissing her. "You are recovering yourself a little, my sweet Mary; and—I—shall I tell you all I have been thinking about this morning, Mary? You look as if you were afraid to say 'yes,'—but I will tell you. I have been thinking, Mary, though your father does not agree with me, that it is more than possible Mr. Cuthbert's dreadful letter may be false. How can it be, dearest, that you and I, who know Harriet so well, so very, very well, how is it possible we should believe that she had any early lover hid in the church, or that any such lover has been seen roaming about with her on the hills?"

The pale face of Mary became dyed with a deep blush, and instead of answering, she endeavoured to hide it by resting her elbow on the table and covering her eyes with her hand.

"Do not endeavour to hide yourself from me, my dearest child," said her mother. "Be as open and candid with me as if you were holding commune with your own heart. If you do not agree with me, Mary, say so! You do not agree with me, then, in thinking the whole of Mr. Cuthbert's statement false? Speak to me, dearest!—tell me!"

Thus urged to speak, Mary could be silent no longer; and though with evident reluctance, replied, "No, mother, no; I cannot think the whole of that dreadful letter false, because there is one part of it which I know to be true."

"What can you mean, Mary Marshdale?" exclaimed her mother, with a mixture of terror and incredulity that made her wait with very painful eagerness for a reply.

Mary so well knew that what she was about to say must shock her mother greatly, and that much was likely to be drawn from her in the examination which was sure to follow, which would now seem, perhaps, much more important than it really was, that she hesitated for a moment, thinking it might be better very positively to decline giving any explanation at all. But this would be so sad an innovation on all their by-gone habits of intercourse that she could not bear it; and, therefore, after a long and painful pause, she said:—

"It is true, mother, that there was one whom I believe to have been an early lover of Harriet's concealed in the church during the performance of the marriage ceremony." . . .

"How do you know this?" demanded her mother, while something like a shudder ran through her frame.

"Because I saw him," replied Mary.

"Who was it, Mary?" said Mrs. Hartwell, almost in a whisper.

"It was Charles Marshdale," was the reply.

"Was she aware of it?" said Mrs. Hartwell.

"I did not name the subject to her," returned her daughter.

"Did you previously know or suspect that there was any attachment between them?" was the next question.

"It is very difficult to answer you, mother, without running the risk of being misunderstood," replied Mary. "Did I say No, it would scarcely be the truth; yet if I said Yes, my conscience would instantly check me for saying more than I have any right to say, because it would be more than I positively know to be true."

"But you suspected such an attachment?" said her mother; "and I cannot deny that there was a time when I, too, thought that something of the sort was very likely to be the consequence of their being so much together. But surely, Mary," she continued, in a manner that almost expressed indignation—"surely you do not mean to tell me that Harriet was attached to Charles Marshdale when she accepted Mr. Cuthbert?"

"No, mamma, I do not," returned Mary firmly. "But—but I have reason to think that it is very likely they may have often met since."

"How can you think anything so improbable, Mary Marshdale! Remember the pride and the prejudices of this odious Lord Corwyn, and then say if you think it likely that he would have permitted her to meet Charles Marshdale often?" said Mrs. Hartwell, eagerly.

"There is a circumstance, my dear mother, of which you and papa are still ignorant, and which would have given you both the very greatest pleasure had it not been for the misfortune which has now fallen upon us. Young Longford, with whom Godfrey has always been very intimate when he has been at home during the Oxford vacations, told him, the very day that this dreadful letter reached papa, that Charles was the author of the poems that were published last March with the name of Charles Martin in the title-page. You know that Charles has been very little in the country for the last year or two, and since Harriet married he has only been here once, which was when he came to our wedding. But though this last visit must have been after the publication of these poems, he never mentioned to his father, brother, sister, or anybody else that he had published or even written anything. He probably did not anticipate the great success which William Long-

ford says has attended them ; but if he had not only expected but known all about it, Godfrey says he never would have himself been the bearer of the news ; for he is both shy and proud. One part of this great success is the having been invited to all the fine houses in London, as if he had been a second Mr. Walter Scott almost, and in that manner he may, and depend upon it he often has, seen Harriet."

Mrs. Hartwell listened to all this with a degree of attention that almost left her breathless ; and certainly her heart sank within her as she listened. She knew her poor Harriet's early and constant love of reading, which she had indulged in with a degree of enthusiasm that had sometimes occasioned her being scolded, and sometimes laughed at ; and she felt that it was possible—oh ! dreadfully possible—that she had nearly, at the same time, discovered her double blunder, and learned to estimate the elegant Mr. Cuthbert and the rustic Charles Marshdale aright.

She felt that all this was possible, and she trembled.

But even then her confidence in her good, her pure-minded, her high-principled child, did not forsake her ; and she said, "But even so, Mary Marshdale, I will not believe her guilty."

"Neither, then, will I, my dearest mother," returned Mary, looking greatly comforted. "I have now told you all—everything that I know in the world that might lead us to believe the dreadful story we have heard ; and if your faith in our poor Harriet stands firm, so shall mine also."

* Susan Marshdale, too, had her own theories on the subject ; but hers, as was natural, were chiefly founded on her own little, private, long-ago observations on her brother Charles's character.

Though not so very much older, she had always been very much like a mother to him, and her confidence in his principles was as firm as that of Mrs. Hartwell in those of Harriet. But she thought that time would plead his cause better than she could. She perceived that her father and Godfrey also felt hurt by the secrecy he had preserved towards them respecting the publication of his poems, and the success of them ; and heard her father say, almost with bitterness, when the subject was canvassed, "Charles is all mystery."

To her and to Godfrey also, poor Mary had mentioned her knowledge of the fact that Charles had been in the church at the moment of Harriet's marriage ; but Susan, though a good deal startled by hearing her say so, inasmuch as she knew nothing of his having been at Penmorris at the time, was not shaken in her faith in his high principles and truly honourable feelings. She, too, had often suspected that he greatly ad-

mired their beautiful neighbour ; but she had had her own theories about this too, and very near the truth did they take her.

In short, she knew her young brother as well as Mrs. Hartwell knew her young daughter ; and a very strong disbelief in the fidelity of my Lord Corwyn's statements was the result in both. Mary was too much comforted by listening to her mother to find much difficulty in adopting her opinions ; and Godfrey's sweet temper led him to listen with pleasure to them both.

But Susan's ideas on the subject were chiefly confined to her own bosom ; for it was not about Harriet but about her brother that she reasoned ; and respecting him the ladies at the Vicarage said little, even to each other, for they too felt that he was "all mystery."

But, unfortunately, the opinions of the two fathers were much less lenient towards the unhappy Harriet. In excuse for this severity on the part of her own father may be pleaded his very natural confidence in the testimony of Charles Marshdale, which must, indeed, have shaken the faith of even Mrs. Hartwell herself had it been communicated to her. But for old Marshdale, all that can be said is, that it did not occur to him as possible that such a letter as Mr. Hartwell had received from Lord Corwyn could be otherwise than true ; for good Mr. Marshdale's knowledge of mankind had been very limited. He knew not that such a thing as Lord Corwyn could by possibility be found ; but, unhappily, this only proved that he was ignorant.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HAVING despatched his precious letter to Mr. Hartwell, Lord Corwyn commanded the presence of his housekeeper, with a very reasonable hope that, by examining her strictly, he might discover the cause of the extraordinary sort of confidential intercourse which, by Mrs. Selby's account, had sprung up between this hitherto very well-behaved old servant and her mistress. His own interpretation of it was, that the old woman had been particularly useful to Lady Corwyn in some way or other, and, if so, a liberal bribe might make his own path smooth and easy enough.

He had listened to the narrative of Selby with the strongest possible inclination to believe that it was all true. The pawnbroker's duplicate certainly went a good way towards making

him believe the rest, and his willing faith made it go further still.

As to his deliberate opinion on the probability of Lady Corwyn's having a lover, it was most decidedly in favour of what he had just heard. By far the deepest knowledge of human character which had as yet been attained by Lord Corwyn in his passage through life, had been gained from sources which may be considered as among pretty nearly the most depraved, although not the coarsest, that civilised society presents. He had long felt convinced that the admiration and unbounded reverence which poor Harriet had displayed towards him during the early part of their acquaintance, had been assumed for the purpose of obtaining his splendid alliance; and once convinced of this, the whole of Mrs. Selby's narrative became highly probable.

So far, all was quite natural, and if his letter to Mr. Hartwell had merely stated the information he had received, and his own belief in it, his conduct might have been considered as justifiable.

But his particular wickedness, in this instance, consisted in his asserting that he had such proof of her guilt as would make him certain of obtaining a divorce, and therefore that the ostentatious marriage settlement he had made upon her was no longer of any value; whereas, he knew perfectly well that he had no proof at all. This, therefore, was a piece of arrant roguery, and proved the man to have been of a thoroughly consistent character.

But, though quite aware of this total deficiency of everything approaching proof, in the narrative to which he had just listened, he by no means thought it improbable that he might obtain from a more favoured confidante something that might serve his purpose.

The getting back the settlement, in the first instance, would, he thought, be a masterly stroke, if it could be achieved, and he was the more sanguine about it, because he believed, and with good reason, that his ignorant father-in-law was too proud and too indifferent in matters of worldly interest, to make much resistance to the demand; and therefore it was that his first act was writing this important dispatch to Mr. Hartwell; but this done, he next prepared himself for the no less important business of examining his housekeeper.

Mrs. Morris appeared before her master with exactly the sort of aspect which defies every attempt to find fault with it. It was quiet and respectful in the extreme.

It would be unnecessarily tedious to follow the dialogue which ensued. It was a considerable time before Mrs. Morris even guessed what he was about; but at length he asked her

a sort of leading question, which awakened her suspicions, and thenceforward she understood him only too well.

Had no confidential intercourse taken place between her and her unfortunate mistress, the old man's suspicions would have been listened to with a very different spirit. The really jealous old husband of a beautiful young wife, might have awakened something like a feeling of pity in the heart of the kind-tempered old woman; but knowing what she did know, rendered this attempt to destroy the innocent being he had so grossly injured, so hideous, that she actually trembled from head to foot, from the vehemence of her indignation and abhorrence.

She wisely restrained herself for a few minutes after she had become fully aware of his object, that she might recover sufficient composure to express what it was her purpose to say, without any such agitation as might render it unintelligible; but upon his asking her, in the shape of a direct question, whether she had ever heard her lady allude to any individual who had wished to marry her before he had himself addressed her, she replied—

"I think, my lord, that it will be more really respectful for me to stop your lordship at once, than to let you go on getting deeper and deeper into the infamous pit which the father of all lies seems to have digged beneath your lordship's feet, in the devilish hope of seeing your lordship fall into it. In answer to your last question, my lord, as well as by way of an answer to all the others which have gone before it, I hereby tell your lordship that, to the very best of my knowledge and belief, my lady is, in act and thought, in word and deed, not only as innocent as a young child, but as nearly resembling an angel as it is possible for a mortal to be."

Lord Corwyn would here have interrupted her, but she held up her hand, as a signal that she had not finished, and then added, "Nay, my lord, hear all; it may be better for you that you should. I hereby give your lordship notice, that should you ever dare, for the attainment of any object whatever, to impugn the honour or the reputation of the admirable and exemplary lady whom I am proud to call my mistress, I will proclaim throughout every court of justice in England, if it be necessary, that I not only defy the whole world to prove her otherwise than innocent, but that she is so in spite of the hellish use which your lordship has been making of her beauty, in order to obtain the title with which the Prince Regent has been pleased to reward your lordship's services."

The old woman here ceased; and, drawing herself up into a posture that had something very like dignity in it, stood before him with the quiet courage of a brave foe who knows he has

given a sharp blow, and fearlessly awaits whatever reprisal may follow.

But the rage into which this most unexpected speech threw Lord Corwyn was really frightful. He knew nothing of his housekeeper, but that she was an old woman who had lived with him for many years without his having found it necessary to find fault with her; but as to the qualities of her mind, or the degree of education which she had received, he knew no more than if he had never seen her. In truth, the idea of applying the words 'mind' and 'education,' to a domestic servant would at any time have appeared to him as most preposterously ridiculous; but he now seemed to have discovered that he had harboured a concealed enemy, of a class entirely different from any from which a decent and respectable servant should be chosen.

But neither his rage, nor the intense scorn which mingled with it, could prevent his feeling that the hated object before him had the power, as well as the will, to frustrate all the hopes which he had built upon the narrative of Mrs. Selby.

Perhaps it was lucky for her that the scene of action at that moment was not Corwyn Castle. The dungeons of that venerable edifice had always been the portion of his large possessions of which he felt most proud; and it is impossible to say in what manner the recollection of these aristocratic appendages to his greatness might have affected him had he found himself just then in their neighbourhood. As it was, however, nothing better in the shape of vengeance seemed within his reach than the paltry power of turning her out of the house, which, compared to that of enclosing her for ever within it, was poor indeed.

Such as it was, however, he proceeded to exercise it with great energy, exclaiming, in a voice which he intended should make her tremble—

"Leave my house this instant, woman! or, so help me Heaven! I will give you into the hands of the police."

The composure with which Mrs. Morris listened to this threat seemed to act like oil upon fire. Lord Corwyn lost all command of himself; and, rushing out of the room, mounted the two flights of stairs which led to his lady's apartment—which he had altogether forsaken since their return from Brighton—and entered it with a degree of brutal violence which might have produced a very injurious effect upon the invalid, had she, as he had fondly flattered himself, fractured her skull when she cut her temple.

Lady Corwyn, by the advice of Mrs. Morris, had left her bed, and was sitting in an easy chair, with her head still bandaged, and looking extremely pale from the loss of blood, as well as

from the mental suffering she had endured : but, nevertheless, she looked so placidly tranquil, as she sat meditating on the precious hopes to which the good housekeeper's prognostics had given birth, that the irritated nobleman stood gazing at her with a look of such undisguised anger and dislike, that she exclaimed, with considerable agitation, "Good Heaven, sir! what is the matter?"

"The matter, ma'am, is, that your infamous conduct is found out," he replied, through his set teeth, and with eyes that positively glared with rage. "Where are my diamonds, you abandoned woman?—where are my family jewels?—heirlooms, heir-looms that you have pawned!—a transaction unequalled for its disgraceful infamy in the annals of civilised life! Speak—say! where am I to look for my jewels? Who is your ladyship's pawnbroker?"

Poor Harriet, who when she had given the little jewel-case to Selby, had not the remotest recollection of its being part of what had been pompously announced to her as family jewels, nor any consciousness whatever that she was about to transact business with a pawnbroker, stared at him with an air as greatly puzzled as if he had questioned her in Arabic; but, upon his repeating his demand, by saying, "Where are the jewels that you sent Selby to pawn for you?" the whole truth at once flashed upon her mind.

But, alas! she could answer nothing, but turning her pale, agitated face against the side of the chair, remained motionless and silent.

This tacit confession of her misdeeds, instead of softening, seemed to irritate him the more, and placing himself before her with a clenched fist, he cried, in a terrific voice, "Tell me where you have pawned the property you have stolen from me! Where have you deposited my family diamonds? Have you given any of them into the hands of your ——"

He dared not finish the sentence. He dared not pronounce the word "lover."

It is true that he had fully believed the statement of Selby; but it is equally so, that he had no power to disbelieve the counter-statement of the hateful old woman who seemed to know his wife as well as she knew herself. He could not tell her she had a lover, he had not sufficient courage for it; but he seemed to think that he might frighten her to death without it.

Lady Corwyn gave one glance at his desperately-malicious face, and then rose from her chair; her purpose was to take refuge in her bed-room, but her strength failed her; she felt that it did, and re-seated herself in a chair near the bed-room door. She did not faint, but her head became alarmingly con-

fused, and she began calling upon Selby, and upon Morris alternately, in a manner that strongly suggested the idea that her reason was shaken.

Lord Corwyn looked at her with a strange meaning in his eye. He was half-frightened, but he was half pleased too; for a new and dreadful idea suggested itself to him.

"If she should go mad," thought he, "and be shut up in a mad-house for life, she would be fitly punished for the treacherous baseness with which she overthrew all my hopes of future favour from the Regent. Whether she has a lover, or whether she has not, she deserves it." And now again he stood before her, and again she looked at him as his mischievous eyes glared upon her.

Her nerves, her spirit, her very soul had been shaken by all she had gone through, and, losing all command of herself, she uttered a sharp cry that did indeed sound like the voice of a terrified maniac. Her base husband felt something like terror too, and, hastily retreating, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

While this scene was passing in Lady Corwyn's dressing-room, her faithful friend Morris was very briskly preparing for her own immediate departure; and, having hastily locked her various trunks and boxes, mounted the back stairs to her lady's bed-room, one door of which opened upon them.

As she approached this door, she met Selby, who was coming from it. The girl was looking greatly agitated, as she might well be, having just overheard every word which Lord Corwyn had addressed to his wife. She had heard her piercing cry, too, and not having courage to enter, was making her way down-stairs in order to find the very person who now met her.

The violent movement of jealous rage which had led Selby so basely to calumniate her mistress, had pretty nearly passed away in the very act of avenging herself, and what she had just overheard had converted all her anger into self-reproach.

She would almost have given a bit of her own mischievous tongue for the power of unsaying all she had said. But Mrs. Morris, who had not the slightest suspicion of what she had been about, was in too great a bustle herself to observe the altered countenance of her fellow-servant, and, laying a hand on her arm, while looking straight forward towards her lady's half-open door, instead of into Selby's face, she said, "His lordship has thought proper to turn me out of doors, Mrs. Selby, and I am only going to say good-bye to my poor dear lady before I start. Take care of her, Selby," added the good woman, while tears started to her eyes. "There never was a kinder, or a better lady, and just now she is both sick and sorrowful. Take care of her when I am gone."

And then the two women passed each other, the housekeeper entering the room of Lady Corwyn, and the waiting-maid descending to the regions below.

Had the unlucky Selby been asked, an hour or two before, what it was that she most wished should happen, her heart would have answered, whatever her lips might have done, that beyond all things she most earnestly desired the dismissal of Mrs. Morris from the service of Lord and Lady Corwyn. But even Macbeth himself could not more sincerely wish his dreadful deed undone, than did poor Selby when she began fully to understand all the mischief she had caused.

She did not, however, fully understand it all yet.

Mrs. Morris found Lady Corwyn exactly where her brutal husband had left her, but she was now, comparatively speaking, composed; and, having yielded to her careful nurse's suggestion that she had better lie down again on the bed, she listened to the old woman's softened statement of what had passed, and became even more than reconciled to her dismissal, when she found that it was her purpose to leave London for Penmorris by that night's mail, bearing with her the letter which had been so cruelly returned, and which she flattered herself, as she said, she should be able to persuade Mr. Hartwell to read.

This interview, though an important one, was soon over. Lady Corwyn was left to dream of the Vicarage, while Mrs. Morris bustled off with the activity of five-and-twenty, secured her place in the mail, removed the most important part of her effects, and got through all that it was necessary for her to do preparatory to her leaving London.

CHAPTER I.

THE repentant Selby, meanwhile, was once more closeted with her confiding master. The message which summoned her again to his presence met her at the bottom of the stairs, and she obeyed it immediately. His first words were an inquiry whether his commands to that "infamous old wretch, Morris," as to her immediately leaving the house, had been obeyed.

"She is either gone, or this very moment going, my lord," replied Selby.

He then drew the key of his lady's room from his pocket, and gave it to her, saying, "You must now go to your unworthy mistress, Selby. She certainly does not deserve the attendance of so good a girl, but, at any rate, you will be no longer tormented by the interference of that most insolent old

woman. That is the key of Lady Corwyn's dressing-room. I locked it, because she seemed to have lost her head. For my own part, I should not be in the least surprised, if, what with shame and disappointment, joined to the blow she got on her head—I say, I should not be the least surprised if she were to end her days in a mad-house. Go to her, will you?" And his lordship held out the key.

Selby turned as pale as death, and did not extend her hand to receive it.

"Don't be an idiot, girl," said his lordship, fiercely. "If you are afraid of her, you may take one of the housemaids with you. And if she does talk a little wildly, just ring the bell, and a medical man shall be sent for immediately—at any rate, I shall call in the proper sort of advice to-morrow. But you must please to remember that if she does say or do anything to make you suppose in the least degree that she is mad, it will be your bounden duty to tell the doctor so when he comes. Most likely you will have to repeat every mad word she utters on oath; and you will be transported for perjury, as sure as your name is Selby, if you conceal the very slightest look or syllable that has the appearance of insanity."

The expression of Lord Corwyn's features, as he said this, was so diabolical, that, joined to the brutal violence she had overheard during his visit to his wife, it so completely terrified the girl, that she felt ready to sink into the earth as she remembered all the mischief she had done. For a minute or two she stood looking at him, and was really gasping between terror and indecision, but, short as this interval was, it sufficed for her to make up her mind.

"Give me the key then, my lord," she said; "I scorn to be afraid—give me the key, and I'll just do everything you bid me."

His lordship's stern brow relaxed, as he put the key into her hand. "If you will keep to that," he said "you are safe, and more than safe, in every way."

Selby stayed to hear no more, but, though really trembling in every joint, hurried up the stairs with all the speed she could make, in order to look honestly after her mistress, and honestly to take care of her.

This sudden revulsion of feeling was not because she had forgotten the five-pound note—she had enjoyed the advantage of some experience in such affairs before—but never had she seen any gentleman, old or young, husband or lover, put himself in such a wicked-looking rage as Lord Corwyn.

At the moment when he finished his speech about transporting her for perjury, she felt the greatest possible inclination to turn round and run out of the house, and

notwithstanding all that had gone before, it was really and truly a movement of compassion towards her mistress which prevented her doing so. The housekeeper was already sent off, and if she herself were to run away after her, who was there to stand by and see that the jealous old Turk did not murder his wife?

Upon entering her lady's room, she found she had gone to bed, and that she was lying in very peaceful composure, though not asleep. She told Selby, who offered to sit up with her, that she did not feel ill enough to require it, but that she wished her to make up a bed for herself in the dressing-room, and to lock both the doors before she went to sleep.

The night, however, passed over without disturbance; and when Lady Corwyn was not meditating on the probable result of good Morris's mediation, she was dreaming of it.

Far different was the condition of Lord Corwyn; for, both in body and soul, he was ill at ease. His meditations, too, were chiefly concerning the effect which Mrs. Morris's testimony was likely to produce, and the consequence of this was, that he determined to give up the divorce, and stick to the insanity. If he could succeed in this, and succeed also in getting back the settlement from Mr. Hartwell, he thought he could make himself tolerably comfortable, in spite of the Prince Regent and his gibing courtiers, by taking his title into the country, and bestowing units, instead of thousands, in regaling his admiring neighbours.

But, notwithstanding these pleasant hopes, he was very restless and very feverish, and did not close his eyes in sleep, till the light of day was peeping at him through his curtains.

His lordship rose at his usual hour, but with a very anxious brow. He did not exactly know what medical practitioner it would be best to call in. Some individuals were so much more men of the world than other individuals, and it was extremely important that he should get hold of a man of the world upon the present occasion. He did not precisely know where to address his inquiries, so as to ascertain, without danger of blundering, where such a one might be found.

His lordship's morning toilet was completed, and his lordship's morning coffee brought to him, before he had decided how to set about this very important transaction.

But he luckily took up the newspaper as he sipped his coffee, and there he saw, quite providentially, as it seemed to him, the advertisement of a gentleman who had devoted himself to the study of insanity, and to the management of a private establishment for the insane.

There was something in the dignified style of this advertisement, which led Lord Corwyn to think that the personage

who put it forth was a man of the world, and to him he decided upon addressing himself in the first instance, feeling certain that he should easily discover, by the aid of his own acuteness, whether he were worthy of the honour designed him or not.

Before he set off to prosecute this inquiry, he deemed it advisable to summon Mrs. Selby to his presence, in order to learn, as nearly as possible, the actual state of the patient.

Now, Selby had passed as restless a night as her master; and the state of her mind may be guessed at by merely repeating an exclamation which she muttered to herself, at least a score of times during the course of it:—"I must have been mad! I must have been mad!" And when she, too, at length fell into a doze in the morning, it was under the influence of the comfortable belief that she might undo all she had done by a little good management.

She obeyed his lordship's summons in the morning with great alacrity, and with a pleasant sort of persuasion, that, let him try what he would, she should be a match for him.

Lord Corwyn addressed her in the most conciliatory and condescending manner, and showed very plainly that it was his intention to take her very much into his confidence. Selby understood him perfectly well; and not even another five-pound note, nor, perhaps, at that moment half a dozen of them, would have bribed her to be false to her own purpose, in order to be true to his.

To his inquiries respecting her mistress, she gave rather vague, but by no means disagreeable answers.

"I can't quite make my lady out," she said. "She certainly is very odd-like and wandering."

"You are a very kind, watchful, and intelligent nurse, Selby," he replied; "and if, as I fear, I should be obliged to place her in the hands of professional attendants, you may depend upon it you shall not be dismissed without a suitable reward."

In reply to this speech Selby said, "Thank you, my lord. I hope I shall prove as able as I am willing, to do my duty."

"No fear of it, Selby," replied her confiding master. "All you have to do is to make this gentleman that I am going to call in, fully understand that the mind of your mistress has been greatly shaken, both by the fracture of her skull—it certainly was fractured—as well as by other things. You may say this without entering into any particulars. Heaven knows, I do not wish to expose her! but you know, Selby, that she has had quite enough to turn her brain, and that she ought to be mad as the best excuse for her conduct."

"She did, indeed, my lord," replied Selby, in her own peculiar idiom, and with more than her usual cleverness.

"And so, my lord," she added, "your lordship does think that the best and safest way will be for her ladyship to be shut up till such time as she comes more to herself like?"

"Yes, indeed I do, Selby," returned his lordship, with the most condescending perspicuity.

"But when does your lordship mean that the doctor shall come for her?" rejoined the girl, shaking her head with a sort of remonstrating look, as if deprecating all unnecessary delay.

"I see what you mean, my good girl!" returned Lord Corwyn, nodding, and looking intelligent. "You are quite right, Selby. I shall only wait till the post comes in, for I rather expect a packet by the mail. But depend upon it I shall not make it late before I set out in search of the doctor, and I dare say I shall be able to bring him back with me. Everything must be ready, you know, for her to go at once. It will be best, perhaps, to have her own carriage brought round even before I return, and you can put in a few necessaries; everything else that may be wanted can go afterwards."

"And how long will it be altogether, my lord?" said Selby, looking with business-like anxiety towards the door. "I shall have lots of things to do, my lord."

"Go, then; but do not flurry yourself, my good girl!" replied her considerate master.

"It won't be needful, my lord, will it, for me to accompany her ladyship?" said the girl, looking rather keenly at him.

"No, Selby—no!" he replied. "At these institutions the attendants always belong to the establishment. And now set about what you have got to do; but I shall not leave the house before one. I shall hope to return, however, within an hour, if I have the good luck to find the doctor at home. His London address is quite near."

Mrs. Selby then made a modest reverence, and left the room.

"No grass must grow beneath my feet!" she murmured, as she mounted by two steps at a time the principal staircase, it being the nearest.

"It isn't quite eleven yet, and he gives us till two; but I must have got done before that time, or where shall we be, I wonder?"

This was very true; but it was not the needful haste which, now harassed Selby, or she would not have relaxed her speed, as she did for the few last steps before she reached her lady's door.

It was only the first part of the business that troubled her;

for, before she could advance one single step in the great atoning enterprise she meditated, she had first to confess her own sins to her mistress, and then to persuade her to trust herself wholly to her guidance. She felt that the first part of her task was likely to render the last extremely difficult.

"And what will become of us," thought she, "if she will not trust me?"

It was with pale cheeks and shaking hands that she opened the door; but the first part of her task went off better than she expected. It is true that she did not enter into any particulars as to the tales she had told, merely saying, "I could not abide to see the housekeeper take my place in waiting upon you, my lady; I felt as if I could have died rather than bear it; but it was a wicked way that I took to cure it; for in my jealousy, I went to my lord, and told him all manner of tales about Mrs. Morris, and about your ladyship too, and it is that as has put him in such a fury against you. She was turned out of the house in no time, and he'll do worse still by your ladyship, if so be as he isn't prevented."

As this confession was uttered amidst tears and sobs, that were too genuine to be misdoubted, Lady Corwyn felt more pity than resentment as she listened to her; and the most difficult part of Selby's task seemed over, when her mistress said—

"Do not cry about it any more, Selby, and never be jealous again if you can help it; for, depend upon it, that it is the worst way in the world to show affection."

Once persuaded that it was possible for her mistress to take her into favour again, all the faculties of the really penitent young woman seemed roused into energetic and serviceable activity; and, casting a hasty but masterly sort of a glance over all she had to do, she remained perfectly still for a minute, considering where she was to begin; and then it struck her that, up to the present time, her unfortunate mistress knew nothing whatever of the frightful scheme which her husband had planned against her, and of the absolute necessity of her being up and stirring, in order to escape from his power.

She immediately explained all this with a degree of clearness, and also of brevity, which did her credit; but, much to the surprise and discomfiture of poor Mrs. Selby, it was evident that Lady Corwyn's opinion as to what was best to be done, differed entirely from her own.

"No, Selby, no," she said; "I cannot run away from my husband's house, till I have apprised my family of the necessity of my doing so. I suppose it is inevitable, after all that has passed, but I really must consult with them about it. When my father says, 'Return to me,' I will do it."

During her short parting interview with Mrs. Morris, Harriet had put into her possession her own still unopened letter to her father, and the good woman had whispered a solemn promise to her, as she received it, that she would herself place that letter in the hands of Mr. Hartwell, and not leave him till he had consented to read it.

Her husband's treachery towards her respecting the whole of her intercourse with the Prince Regent was, as she well knew, 'le mot de l'enigme' of all the misery and disgrace which had fallen upon her, and this once-explained, would clear up everything, and open to her the hearts and the arms of all the dear beings who now looked away from her with abhorrence.

Could she, while things remained in this state, present herself before them?

Besides, the time would be so short. She felt assured that Morris had left London by the mail of the last night, and felt also at her very heart a most delightful assurance that, as soon as she could have an answer to the letter she had carried, it would come.

"I am quite certain, dear Selby, that you wish to befriend me," said she, "but I should be doing wrong to leave my home at this moment, without a better sanction for doing so. Depend upon it Selby, you over-rate the danger. Lord Corwyn's anger about those unlucky diamonds is, I confess, very violent, and very disproportioned to the fault I committed in parting with them; but as to his shutting me up in a mad-house for it, it is really too foolish to talk about. No, Selby, I cannot run away till I have better reasons for it than I have now."

"Better reasons for it?" cried the justly-terrified girl, who plainly perceived that her mitigated confession, in omitting all that concerned her "early amours," had failed to make her unfortunate mistress aware of the real state of Lord Corwyn's mind respecting her.

"Better reasons!—my lady," she added, amidst tears and sobs—"it is dreadful to tell you all, but I will do it, if you kill me for it; I will do anything rather than see you run to your own destruction."

And accordingly, she did tell her all.

Lady Corwyn listened to her without betraying any symptom of resentment, but she became paler and paler as the girl went on, and such an expression of dismay took possession of her features, that Selby forgot the pain of self-crimination in the joy of believing that she had conquered all her scruples.

"Then you will go, my dearest lady?" she said; "you will get ready to go instantly?"

"Go! go to my father—an early lover!" murmured the un-

fortunate Harriet, fixing her eyes wildly on the face of her maid ; "walking with a lover on the downs at daybreak ? Has my father heard this, too ? Did you send this story to my father, Selby ?"

"No, my lady, no ! never in my life !" cried the sobbing girl.

"But I am sure he has heard it," said Lady Corwyn, thoughtfully ; "why else did he send back the letter—the money ? Oh, yes ; he must have heard it ! Charles Marshdale, my lover ! Charles Marshdale walking with me at daybreak ! Leave me, Selby, pray, leave me ! If you knew all the cruelty of this most mistaken story, you would not wonder at my not liking to have you with me. I have no lover, Selby—indeed, indeed, I have no lover, Selby !"

If, instead of this tearful, but most gentle remonstrance, Lady Corwyn had angrily and passionately protested her innocence, the impression upon the mind of her blundering accuser would have been very different, for it would only have been what she expected, and what she thought she must make up her mind to hear.

But the unmistakeable horror, and the genuine astonishment which the suggestion had created, convinced her at once and the same moment that her mistress was innocent, and that she herself was one of the most sinful creatures that ever existed.

"Oh, my lady—my lady !" she cried, falling down upon her knees beside the bed ; "be an angel from first to last, and forgive me ! I know you are innocent ! I know it now, as well as if I was inside your own heart. But I have seen so much badness, my lady, that, Heaven forgive me ! I did not think such a thing was possible. But if you will forgive me, and believe in me now, just as I believe in you, I will pay you for all your angelic goodness, for I will save you from destruction ; and don't worry your dear heart by fancying that your papa has heard of my wicked lie, for he has not. I told it to my lord, though, and that's the reason why he is going to have you shut up from the light of day ; and, unless you listen to me now, you will die in darkness and in chains, though you are in your right senses ; and I shall die raving mad with thinking what I have done !"

This, also, was a burst of true feeling ; Lady Corwyn recognised it as such, and felt that now, at least, her pale and penitent waiting-maid deserved to be trusted. She felt too, that there was greatly more probability that her unprincipled husband would commit the outrage he had threatened if he believed her guilty of infidelity, than if the pawning of his diamonds had been the only offence laid to her charge. And no sooner had the idea suggested itself that such an outrage was probable,

than she shared in all the anxiety expressed by her maid that she should escape from it. Not a moment more was lost, and a wonderfully short time sufficed for all the preparations that they deemed necessary.

The carriage of his lordship was heard to drive from the door. Selby flew to the front window, threw it up, and rejoiced her spirit by ascertaining that her car had not deceived her.

Five minutes afterwards, she boldly descended the stairs, and inquired if his lordship had given orders that the carriage of her ladyship should come round?

The answer was most satisfactory, accompanied by a brisk observation from the footman, that it would be at the door in no time.

Mrs. Selby then remounted the stairs, and again stood before her mistress. Poor Harriet had not moved an inch since she left her; but she looked more tranquil, and somewhat less pale; for she had been thinking, that notwithstanding all the horrors which surrounded her, she was going home; that she must see her father, mother, and Mary, in some way or other, whether Mrs. Morris got to the Vicarage before her or not; and though she trembled as she thought of presenting herself with doubt and fear where she was wont to be held as so precious and so dear, the thought of being near them all, in any way, brought a warm life-like feeling to her heart that revived her wonderfully.

Mrs. Selby was highly satisfied by her appearance; it was more favourable than she had dared to hope for; but in the next moment, a heavy cloud seemed again to settle itself upon the features of the anxious abigail. She suddenly remembered the empty condition of her lady's purse, and her own was not in a much better state, for Mrs. Selby was a very elegant dresser.

"What are we to do for money, my lady?" she exclaimed, with very genuine dismay.

Harriet closed her eyes for a moment as if to recollect herself; and then said, with a melancholy smile, "There is no need to alarm yourself on that account, Selby;" and, once more applying herself to the little table-drawer, she drew thence the bank notes returned from the Vicarage, the first sight of which had caused her so terrible a pang.

Selby felt a good deal astonished, but said nothing, save that she ejaculated very earnestly, "Thank Heaven!" And then, presenting one arm to her mistress, while with the other she held a tolerably large carpet-bag, containing a few travelling necessities, she led her down-stairs and across the hall, with a good deal of that demonstrative sort of attention with

ries him back, back, back, but he only gets bruised more and more by doing so.

On arriving at his own door, Lord Corwyn was much surprised, and of course exceedingly angry, at not seeing her ladyship's carriage waiting there, according to the orders he had given before he left the house.

"How is this, sir?" was his address to the first servant who appeared; "did I not order Lady Corwyn's carriage to be in waiting for her before I came back?"

By this time there were two liveried lacqueys standing dutifully ready to be scolded, but, on hearing a question, the answer to which must so completely exculpate everybody, they both replied together, "It did come round, my lord." To which the boldest of the two added, "And my lady got into it, almost directly, along with Mrs. Selby."

"Gone!" cried his lordship, in a sharp, shrill accent, that sounded like the scream of a wounded vulture.

"Yes, my lord; they drove off together, without losing a minute."

All the blood in Lord Corwyn's body seemed to rush into his face, as he articulated, "Where are they gone?" and his countenance was really terrible, as he received from each the selfsame answer, "I don't know, my lord."

"A very common accident indeed, when a patient is imperfectly watched, my lord," said the professional gentleman, as he followed him into the house; "but, you may depend upon it, we shall find her again. They never get very far."

"Where are we to look? What are we to do?" cried his lordship, staring as if he had been stunned.

"Oh! the servants and carriage will return," said the doctor.

"And when they do return?" retorted his lordship, again becoming very red.

"There will be no great difficulty then, my lord," replied the advertiser; "when ladies run off that way, one must not stand upon ceremony as the manner of getting them back again."

Lord Corwyn remained silent for a moment, and then said, "You shall hear from me, sir, as soon as I have any information."

The doctor then observed, in a very gentleman-like manner, that it was usual, under such circumstances, to give a consultation fee. The consultation fee was given, and the doctor walked off.

Being thus left to his own resources, his lordship ordered various individuals of his household to appear before him, for the purpose of being examined respecting this most mysterious transaction. The disappearance of Selby added greatly to his astonishment and alarm; and disagreeable enough were the

feelings with which he sat down to await the return of the men who had attended Lady Corwyn's carriage.

Great would have been the consolation, could he have received, during that weary waiting-time, the long-expected packet, or even any answer of any kind from Mr. Hartwell. Over and over again, he declared to himself that the conduct of that gentleman was infamous, and found some slight consolation in resolving that he would speedily transmit that opinion to Mr. Hartwell himself. •

It was not, however, to deliver either packet or letter that the footman opened the door, in the course of this disagreeable interval, but it was to announce a visit which was anything but pleasant to the ill-at-case new nobleman, being, in plain English, neither more nor less than that of a dun, and a very pressing one too, for a sum which not even his dignity could enable him to consider as small, and which he had not yet found it convenient to pay, though contracted as long ago as when his celebrated ball was given to the Prince Regent.

The urgency of the claim arose from the bargains having been made for ready money ; the estimate stating the difference of cost under this sort of arrangement, as being so material, that the then Mr. Cuthbert agreed to it, without calculating very accurately his ready-money means.

Another man, under such circumstances, would probably have been civil to the tradesman, but this was not his lordship's ordinary habit ; the interview was therefore a stormy one, concluding with a very deliberate assurance on the part of the decorative upholsterer, that if he did not receive payment within forty-eight hours, he should send an execution into the house.

This scene did not tend to tranquillize the already fermenting blood of his lordship, and he was beginning to feel some rather disagreeable sensations about his head, when he was respectfully informed that Lady Corwyn's own footman was returned.

This news acted very effectively as a stimulant ; the headache seemed to give way before it, and the man was commanded to appear before him immediately.

But the headache soon returned, and rather worse than before, when he found that all which this very innocent-looking footman had to tell, was, that her ladyship and Mrs. Selby had been driven to a small shop somewhere in the city ; did not know what shop, because he had never been there before. But he further stated that, after they had remained in the shop for a few minutes, Mrs. Selby had come out again, and ordered the carriage and servants to go home, because her ladyship would return with a friend.

It would be useless to recite all the sayings and sendings, the fruitless inquiries, and the useless rage of Lord Corwyn, during the rest of that eventful day. Had there, 'par l'impossible,' been any one near him who cared a single farthing whether he lived or died, it is probable he would have been bled, and he might have been much the better for it; but as it was, he went to bed in a very feverish condition, and was very much in the same state when he got up again. On that day, however, he did not wait in vain for a letter bearing the Penmorris post-mark, for the following epistle was delivered to him :—

"MY LORD,

"I feel that it is possible your last fruitless journey to this place may discourage your lordship from taking another; but had you followed my advice then, my lord, it probably would not have been fruitless. I then strongly advised you to remain at the Manor House, and had you done so, you would have found, not only that Mrs. Osterly had recovered the power of signing her name, but also that you might very easily have kept at a distance the only person who was an enemy to your interest. Mrs. Osterly has now rallied again wonderfully, and is perfectly capable of remedying whatever testamentary mistakes she may have made. I have done what I consider to be my duty, in giving your lordship this information,

"And remain,

"Your lordship's obedient servant,

"SARAH SHRIFFLY."

This most unexpected summons produced a very favourable effect on Lord Corwyn, for it not only diverted his thoughts from the many painful subjects upon which they had been brooding, but suggested, in their stead, many pleasant ideas respecting the future. He had never in his life felt so anxious to secure his cousin's inheritance as he did at this moment. Let half a dozen of the Regent's pet puppies sneer at him if they liked it. It was not an easy thing to sneer down a man with above twelve thousand a year, especially when the sneerers could not, for the most part, honestly declare themselves to be worth a revenue of twelve pence. If Lord Corwyn had been a healthful young giant instead of a feverish old man, he could scarcely have left London with more alacrity.

* * * * *

His runaway young wife, meanwhile, was preceding him on the same road in the mail, which, at the time of which I am writing, was perhaps the quickest possible mode of conveyance; moreover, her ladyship had about eighteen hours the start of him, so that she had reached the little hotel called the Osterly

Arms, nearly a day and a night before his lordship drove up to the Osterly Manor House.

It was in very humble guise that Lady Corwyn entered the well-known little hostelry ; so humble, indeed, that although she had been well known there eighteen short months before as the most beautiful young lady in all the country round, she passed into the little parlour without being recognised by any one.

This incognito, which she was most earnestly desirous to preserve, was assisted by the darkness, as well as by a tolerably thick veil which she carefully kept over her face. Her thoughts had been occupied during very nearly the whole of the long journey, in deciding upon what would be the best manner of presenting herself at the Vicarage.

For more than half the distance she had determined upon not losing a single unnecessary moment before she placed herself where her heart and soul so ardently longed to be ; she felt very confident that Mrs. Morris must be already arrived, and very reasonably decided that, if such were the case, no advantage whatever could be gained by waiting any longer. But as she drew near to the well-known village, her heart failed. She really and truly believed that she should not survive a cold reception at the Vicarage. "And what would their feelings be afterwards, when they discovered the truth?" thought she. "It will be better for us all not to run any risk."

A stronger proof could not have been given of Harriet's having greatly suffered, than was displayed in this instance of nervous timidity. It was so unlike the natural hopeful condition of her mind ! But she could not struggle against it now, and therefore, after entering the little parlour, and, greatly to Mrs. Selby's amazement, ordering tea, which was done by way of giving her a right to remain in it, she told her maid that before she could go to the Vicarage herself, she must find out whether Mrs. Morris had arrived there.

Selby stared ; and feeling that it was necessary to make her, in some degree, understand the reason of this caution, in order to ensure her assistance in using it, Lady Corwyn added, "The truth is, Selby, that I have reason to think my poor father has heard, by some means or other—I don't mean through you—some of the evil reports that have been circulated against me. Mrs. Morris knows everything about it, and when she left Cavendish Square, she promised to come down here directly, to explain everything. What I want to know is only whether she has arrived. Do you think that you could find this out for me, without being known yourself ? And what do you think would be the best way of setting about it ?"

The being thus frankly called to council by her deeply-

injured mistress, put the waiting-maid immediately upon the alert.

"The servants at the Vicarage would all know me, in half a moment, my lady," she replied. "But there isn't a single soul as knows me here at the inn, for I can't abide such an inn as this, my lady, and never put foot into it while I stayed. Let me just go into the kitchen, and say I want to beat up an egg for you, and before it's half done, I'll answer for it I'll find out if anybody coming from London by the mail stopped here, and then went to the Vicarage."

Lady Corwyn gave her consent; the experiment was made, and answered perfectly, for, in about five minutes, Selby re-entered the parlour with the egg in her hand, and with the welcome information on her lips, that the old lady who had come down by the mail, last night, had been shown her way to the Vicarage early that morning, and, to the best of the landlady's belief, had been staying there ever since.

This information was certainly very welcome, but it was very agitating, too, for now the very moment was come which was to decide whether she was to be happy or miserable! There was bodily as well as mental weakness in the slowness of the movement with which poor Harriet, after passing her arm under that of her maid, began her walk to the Vicarage. But perhaps her native air revived her, or other feelings, of a character too ardent for timidity to overpower, were awakened as her eye caught each well-known object in the faint moonlight. Every post, every tree was familiar; and instead of proceeding slowly, she was walking at her very utmost speed, when she reached the little green gate which opened upon the Vicarage garden.

She opened it with her own hand, for Selby's was not quick enough, and then, almost giddy with agitation, she rather ran than walked up the short gravel path that led to the house door.

Was that door fastened? It used to be locked and bolted only when her father went to bed, but if it were fastened now, she felt as if she should sink upon the step before it could be opened. She put her hand upon the handle of the lock, but had no strength to turn it.

"You do it, Selby," she whispered; and the door was opened.

That of the parlour was at right angles to it. There they all were; she knew it, for she heard their voices? Should she wait? Should Selby go on? No, no; it must be now or never. She could not wait, she could not stand, and in the next moment she had herself opened the parlour door, and stood before the eyes of her assembled family.

What was the sound that greeted her? It was not a shriek,

it was not a shout, but it was a chorus, pronouncing the single word, "Harriet!"

What happened next it would have been impossible for either of the persons present to state, even the very moment afterwards. Lady Corwyn did not faint, though it was what most medical men would have predicted the moment before. But that chorus had been intoned in perfect unison, and Harriet, though a poor musician, had a fine ear. The harmony that greeted her was so full of love, that, instead of fainting, she felt as if she were now again completely invigorated and revived, and that to a degree that she had never felt since she had last passed through the door of that dear parlour. It was not likely, perhaps, to last very long without being quenched, for a time, at least, by some of the moral and physical weaknesses to which mortals are obliged to yield, but while it did last, the happy creature seemed endowed with such acuteness of hearing, sight, and feeling, as no mortal ever possessed before. She heard them all—father, mother, Mary, and Godfrey—pronounce her name as nobody had ever pronounced it before. No; not even themselves—no, not one of them—had ever contrived before to make the word "Harriet" express all that the human heart could feel of love and joy, of pity and contrition, of cheerful hope and tender fearfulness. But Lady Corwyn found it all in that word "Harriet;" and it was no delusion, for it was all there; and she saw their faces, and perhaps these and the voices helped to explain each other, for the faces, too, expressed exactly the same things; and she felt their arms around her, and their kisses on her cheeks, and on her hands, and on her lips; and then, for a little while, she neither heard, saw, nor felt anything.

But it was not like fainting, either; it was like a soft delicious sleep that stole over her, and kept her, as it were, at rest for a few quiet moments.

When she opened her eyes again, the first thing she saw—happy, happy creature!—was her father, on his knees before her. One of his arms encircled her, and the hand of the other was in the act of putting back the curls that hung long and languidly over her pale face. And his dear, venerable face was raised to hers with such a look!—Harriet lived many years after her father died, but that look lived for her as long as she lived herself; and though it was rarely recalled, perhaps, without a tear, the remembrance of it was a constant and unfailing source of the very purest pleasure that it was possible for a heart to feel.

Notwithstanding all this, it was not very long before Lady Corwyn perceived that there was another person in the room besides her father mother, Mary, and Godfrey. In the very

darkest and furthest corner of the little parlour stood Mrs. Morris, who had been a guest there from the moment she presented herself and the precious credentials that she brought with her; she stood without moving a limb or uttering a sound, and if her heart did glow with a proud and most delicious consciousness that what she looked upon was her own work, she might and must, for once in her life, be excused for the egotism.

But she was not left to enjoy her inward boasting in tranquillity very long after Harriet perceived her.

"Oh! there is my guardian angel!" she exclaimed. "Bring her to us, papa—bring her to us! Where should I be now, had it not been for her?"

It was very difficult for any single individual of the party then and there assembled, to conduct themselves on that remarkable evening with anything like discretion.

There sat Lady Corwyn, one moment as pale as the lily, and the next as red as the rose; trembling so vehemently, that she returned the pressure of all the dear hands that successively clasped hers, with a grasp that was almost convulsive; and laughing and sobbing alternately, in a way that would have made the youngest apothecary's apprentice in England send her to bed upon his own authority,—there she sat in the midst of them, without its even entering the heads of either father, mother, Mary, or Godfrey, that they ought to see her gently conducted to a bed-room, and neither look at her, nor speak to her again—no, not even her mother—till she had tasted some hours of rest.

How long they might all have gone on in this very improper style, it is impossible to say, but the guardian angel interfered at last.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," she began—"but my lady has been too ill since her accident," she continued, turning to Mrs. Hartwell—"to make it right for her to stay up so long after her journey."

This remonstrance was more than sufficient. Mary was out of the room in a moment, to see that her room was prepared. Godfrey quietly, and without even uttering "Good night!" lest she should say "Good night" in return, stole out into the garden; while the father and mother, exchanging a melancholy glance as Mrs. Morris pronounced the word "accident," the cause and nature of which had been fully explained to them, became suddenly silent, and almost seemed afraid to look at her.

It is not quite impossible that Harriet guessed their feelings, or something like it.

After the sudden stillness had endured for a moment, she changed the course of their thoughts by saying—

"Come close to me, my dear Mrs. Morris ! I have something to say to you, and I want papa and mamma to hear it too, because I think that they will help to obtain for me what I ask, both from you, my dear friend, and from everybody else that comes near me." Mrs. Morris was instantly at her side, and both father and mother listened for what she was going to say, as if life depended on it ; for she was evidently very much in earnest. "My dear, dear Morris," she said—"my dear and well-tried friend, I have a favour to beg of you, which is of more importance to my happiness, than you will easily imagine. You must promise me, Mrs. Morris, never to address me as my lady, and never to speak of me as her ladyship. I have suffered, father—dearest mother ! I have suffered much !—and there have been moments in which I have thought and believed that I should pay, by an early death, for my disobedience to your wishes, papa—so gently expressed, yet so plainly understood. But the sight of you all, and your still tender love for me, has already chased all such dismal thoughts, and I now hope to live, and prove a more dutiful daughter for the future ; but this cannot be, I think, if anybody calls me 'Lady Corwyn' or 'your ladyship.' Let me be Harriet, to you all. Let me hear no other name, unless it be 'little Harry,' and you will find that I shall grow strong and well apace."

There were tears shed as she spoke, but there were smiles smiled, too. The asked-for promise was given, and little Harry was put into bed by her mother and Mary, much as she might have been when some childish illness was made an excuse for extra petting, some half a score of years before ; and refreshing, as the "gentle dew from Heaven," was the sweet sleep that followed.

CHAPTER LII.

THIS party at the Vicarage, to which "Farmer Marshdale" and Susan were joined on the following day, may be left to themselves for a little while, having a great deal to say, and to feel, which, though not free from pain, nor even from self-reproach, had nevertheless an immensity of happiness in it.

The Lord Corwyn, in the meantime, pursued his way, and arrived without delay or accident of any kind at the Manor House. Mrs. Osterly was still lying—with very little power of moving—in her bed, but was—as Miss Shrieffly very truly informed him—perfectly in her senses, and perfectly able to

express her wishes upon a slate, although her frequent attempts at articulation were still unsuccessful.

This was much as he had expected ; but what he did not expect was the finding Mrs. Montagu established in the bedroom of the invalid, who, as Miss Shriuffy confessed, made no opposition to her being there. But, notwithstanding this notorious fact, his lordship's correspondent declared herself to be strongly of opinion that Mrs. Osterly permitted this attendance for no reason in the world but that she might have the pleasure of disappointing her at last. It was with a curious sort of contrast between manner and matter, that Miss Shriuffy went on to explain her reasons for coming to this opinion.

Her manner was that of a mournful, sympathizing friend, detailing circumstances connected with the past character and present condition of the dearly-beloved dying relative of the person she addressed ; while the matter consisted of very broad allusions to that unfortunate order of feelings which are usually denominated diabolical, dwelling particularly on the extreme pleasure always evinced by poor dear Mrs. Osterly, when she could persuade anybody that she meant one thing, when in reality she meant another.

Lord Corwyn had not of late years had much opportunity of studying the character of his cousin, but he knew Miss Shriuffy had, and he seemed to think that the portrait she drew was very likely to be a resemblance. He therefore agreed with her that the only thing to be done was to send once more for Mr. Coleman the lawyer, and persuade him, if possible, to stay in the house for a day or two, for the chance of their finding some favourable moment in which such feelings as Miss Shriuffy attributed to the invalid might be turned to profitable account.

Meanwhile, this estimable friend undertook to announce to her patroness the arrival of her attentive cousin. The old lady had already been made to understand that he had obtained a title, and she seemed at once to recognise who was meant when "Lord Corwyn" was mentioned.

"Stretch out your hand, my dear madam," said Miss Shriuffy affectionately, "if you would wish to see his lordship."

There was too much intelligence in the eyes of the paralytic lady to permit any doubt as to her having perfectly understood the words thus addressed to her ; but, nevertheless, she made no sign, lying for several minutes profoundly still, with her eyes fixed on the face of Mrs. Montagu, who was, as usual, seated in a chair so placed by the side of the bed as to enable her to receive from the looks and signs of her poor suffering cousin, such indications of her wants and wishes as she was able to communicate.

But, as usual also, she had a book in her hand, and had too much delicacy to raise her eyes from it at this very interesting moment.

At length, however, the old lady appeared to change her mind, for she deliberately and distinctly stretched out her hand.

Whether she saw it or not, Mrs. Montagu still read on, and Miss Shriffly lost the pleasure of seeing any expression of alarm on her features.

Few minutes were suffered to elapse before Lord Corwyn presented himself. He looked very humble, very penitent, and very affectionate, bending his noble head over the bed till his lip touched his cousin's hand. Of Mrs. Montagu he took no more notice than if she had been a servant whom he had never seen before.

A smile—more like a smile than what she had achieved the last time he stood before her—lighted up Mrs. Osterly's countenance as she gazed upon him; and, after the interval of a minute or two, she made the covenanted signal for having the slate brought to her. Miss Shriffly, who already held it in her hand, placed it carefully before her, and the words "I wish you joy, my lord!" were very legibly inscribed upon it.

"Thank you—thank you, my dear cousin!" said his lordship, in an accent of great tenderness; and he presently added, "Would you like that I should sit down by you?"

"If you like it, my lord," was almost immediately written upon the slate.

His lordship replied to this very eagerly, by saying—

"Indeed I do like it!"

And at the same time put his hand upon the back of Mrs. Montagu's chair, as if he thought that the only way of making this arrangement was by taking her place.

Mrs. Montagu was aware of the action, and probably understood it, for she now raised her eyes from her book, and looked at the invalid, very evidently for the purpose of receiving an expression of her will.

This expression was immediately given by a movement of the head and eyes towards the other side of the bed; upon which Miss Shriffly immediately placed a chair on the right-hand side of Mrs. Osterly, precisely in a similar situation to that which Mrs. Montagu occupied on the left.

There certainly was something very whimsical in this position of the rival cousins; and it could hardly be doubted by anybody who knew Mrs. Osterly, and watched her as she slowly turned her eyes from one to the other, that she felt this, and enjoyed it.

His lordship felt excessively awkward, and would have given

a good deal for a book, or even a newspaper, which might have enabled him to imitate the enviable composure of Mrs. Montagu. But there were no possible means of his obtaining such an indulgence ; neither did there appear any reasonable hope of his being speedily released from his embarrassing position ; for, having indulged herself for some time by looking at her two relatives alternately, in the manner above described, Mrs. Osterly arranged herself comfortably and composedly, while, with her eyes half closed, she lay as still as a cat when watching a mouse's hole. After what appeared to Lord Corwyn an immensely long time, he fancied that the eyelids of the old lady dropped ; and presently after, he fondly persuaded himself that she had fallen asleep.

Gently, most gently, did he prepare to avail himself of this wished-for blessing ; but scarcely had he moved a single joint, ere the lady of the manor moved too, and by widely opening her still speculative eyes, seemed to tighten the chain in which he had so unwarily entangled himself.

This scene lasted for several hours ; and at last it was his lordship who went to sleep, and not Mrs. Osterly—an event of which that acute lady was immediately aware, and which she hailed with a look of very comic complacency.

The following day brought Mr. Coleman, who made no objection to fixing his head-quarters at the Manor House, and was greatly encouraged to do so by Mr. Bates, the apothecary, who scrupled not to declare that his patient was so materially better as to render it by no means improbable that she might be partially restored to the use of all her faculties. She ate and slept with the most perfect regularity ; appeared to be quite free from suffering ; and on being asked, on the third day after Lord Corwyn's arrival, whether she would like to see her old friend Mr. Coleman, replied, by means of her slate, "To-morrow."

Had the day thus fixed for this important interview been less near, it is probable the impatient nobleman would not have waited to ascertain the result of it, for his temper was getting beyond his own control. There was something in the philosophical composure of Mrs. Montagu that almost drove him mad ; and though he had reached the Manor House with a very firm determination not to leave it so impatiently as before, his resolution was fast giving way before the various annoyances which beset him.

He had by this time learned from Miss Shriffly that his runaway wife had taken refuge with her father, and had brought with her two of his lordship's female servants. That Selby was a traitor he could no longer doubt ; and he was quite aware that the three together would form a coalition which, joined

to the refuge she had chosen, would make it very difficult for him to obtain the verdict he had once hoped for against her in a court of justice. And besides all this, he felt ill. But as the morrow was fixed for Mrs. Osterly's again seeing her lawyer, he determined not to indulge his longing desire to return home till it was over.

Exactly at twelve o'clock on the morrow the old lady made a signal for the slate, and wrote upon it the name of the lawyer in legible characters. He entered her room within five minutes afterwards, and she then wrote the words, "All go."

This mandate was, of course, obeyed, and the old lady and her man of business were left alone.

What passed between them was not likely to transpire immediately; for, on returning to the sitting-room, Mr. Coleman ordered his horse, desiring the servant to bring it round as quickly as possible.

In this sitting-room, Lord Corwyn and Miss Shrifflly were found tête-à-tête by the lawyer; but as, instead of speaking to either of them, he betook himself to looking very earnestly out of the window, they felt, severally and mutually, that there seemed but little chance of obtaining any information upon the subject which engrossed their thoughts. Lord Corwyn could not condescend to question him; but he got up, and making Miss Shrifflly a sign to follow him, left the room.

This sign was immediately obeyed; and, as soon as the parlour door was shut upon them, Lord Corwyn desired the lady to return, and point-blank ask the taciturn attorney if anything had passed which it was important for him, Lord Corwyn, to know; as affairs of consequence rendered it absolutely necessary for him to return to London with as little delay as possible; and he should be sorry to depart without obtaining whatever information that gentleman thought himself at liberty to give.

Miss Shrifflly waited not to make any reply, but immediately re-entered the parlour, and gave the message very precisely.

"I do not feel myself at liberty to give any information whatever on the subject," replied the attorney, very decisively; and, seeing his horse at the same moment making his appearance from behind the shrubs which masked the stables, he seized upon his hat and made his escape, slightly bowing to Lord Corwyn as he passed him in the hall.

For a moment, after listening to Miss Shrifflly's rather civil version of this message, his lordship thought that the lawyer's refusing to communicate what had passed was a very decisive proof that he had no agreeable news to give him. But he pre-

sently recollected that lawyers were often enjoined to secrecy, and it might be so in this instance. Nevertheless, he still felt a very strong inclination to depart; for, being ill at ease, both in body and mind, and, moreover, of a temper so irritable as to endure no evil patiently for a moment, it was a difficult task to assume an air of philosophic composure before the eyes of the household, to say nothing of the eyes of Mrs. Osterly herself, the recollection of whose sidelong glances as he sat beside her bed was a sort of torture to him.

And then the terror of being called upon to resume that place, which was, to his impatient spirit, literally a place of torment, began to work within him, till he muttered execrations against the unlucky Miss Shrifflly, for having exposed him to so much suffering.

But for all this he could not as yet make up his mind to abandon all hope of the succession which would be now so particularly convenient and agreeable.

He remembered his debts, he remembered the necessity of supporting his title by a degree of splendour that must make him respected in the eyes of all men; and he remembered, too, the soothing sensations he should experience from making his title, and his increased wealth, sound in the ears, and shine before the eyes of the hated and despised inhabitants of the detestable little Vicarage, when he should take up his abode at the Manor House. These turbulent meditations took place in a solitary walk which the uncomfortable nobleman took up and down the great drawing-room, which, though there was no fire in it, he preferred to any other room, because he was pretty sure of having it to himself.

This exercise had endured till his lordship was beginning to feel weary, and he was in the very act of drawing out his watch, in order to see whether it was not almost time to begin getting himself dressed for dinner, when his attention was called to a very unusual sort of tumult in the hall.

There were evidently many voices, all making themselves heard together; a circumstance so remarkable in a house where it was very rare to hear any voice at all, save in a whisper, that he hastened to the door, and threw it open, not without a painful thought that the house might be on fire.

It was neither flame nor smoke, however, which greeted his eyes as he stepped forth, but a group of three women and two men-servants, with Miss Shrifflly in the midst.

"What is the matter?" cried Lord Corwyn, in a voice of authority.

"Oh! my lord!—how lucky you are found," exclaimed Miss Shrifflly. "I did not know where to send for you. Never dreamed of the drawing-room. It is coming to an end now;

my lord ! I have this moment left the room. She has had another fit, and looks as if she were dead already ; but she is not, they say. I shook and trembled so, I could not feel her pulse myself. Would you like to go up, my lord ? Would you like to take the chance of her coming to, and saying anything before witnesses, just at the last ? That hateful Mrs. Montagu stands there like a statue, so that nobody can get close enough to make out for certain whether she is dead or alive."

All this was uttered very much as if the speaker intended to go into a fit herself, as soon as she had finished her harangue ; and Lord Corwyn did not listen to it with indifference—far from it.

He declined entering his cousin's room, however—very sensibly observing, that he could do no good ; and, having ascertained that the medical man had been sent for, and the attorney also, he ventured to hint that he thought the best thing they could do would be to hasten the dinner a little, in order that it might be got over before these gentlemen arrived ; adding, with a degree of gentleness which showed that he was deeply impressed with the solemnity of the present circumstances—"I really think, Miss Shriffly, that we shall both of us be better for a glass of wine."

CHAPTER LIII.

Nothing could be much more contrasted than the manner in which Lord and Lady Corwyn were passing their time during this interval. The occupations of his lordship have been already described. Those of her ladyship consisted almost wholly in receiving and giving proof of unchanged affections and reviving hopes.

The only thing that seemed to bring balm to the wounded conscience of Mr. Hartwell, who declared himself to have been the most hard-hearted and harshly-judging father that had ever persecuted an innocent child—the only thought that had power to make him smile, was found in Harriet's reiterated declaration that, if father and mother, both, would agree to take her home again, call her nothing but Harriet, and never let her get within sight of any very fine folks again, she should not only be as happy, but a great deal happier than she had ever been in all her life before, because now she had learned to know what real happiness was.

Her wishes on this point, and their accordance with them, being once thoroughly understood among them all, they

seemed by mutual and almost tacit consent to await the expected event at the Manor House, as well as any interference on the part of Lord Corwyn, with as much philosophy as might be necessary to prevent their present enjoyment from being affected by either.

During the second day after Harriet's arrival, she was walking in the garden, and enjoying a very delightfully confidential conversation with her father, detailing to him, with most faithful accuracy, the manner in which her loyalty had been turned against her, and almost making him laugh by declaring that all her misfortunes were owing to his love and affection for George the Third—she was walking thus, in the full enjoyment of recovered peace, when they reached the shrubby bench, which has been more than once mentioned in the early part of my story; and, notwithstanding the coldness of the season, she got her father to sit down on it with her.

She certainly was not thinking of Charles Marshdale when she did this, but no sooner had she taken her place upon the bench, than the remembrance of the scene which had passed the last time she sat there, recurred to her, and, suddenly turning towards her father, she said, "There is one thing, my dearest, dear papa, that you have never told me, but which I am very curious to know. Who was it that gave you the dreadful statement which caused you to write to me? Was it Charles Marshdale?"

Greatly shocked was poor Harriet at perceiving the intense suffering which her father's countenance expressed, as he listened to this question. Gladly would she have withdrawn it, but her attempting to do this would have done no good, for he replied, "I cannot answer your question, my dear child! I gave a solemn promise, when I received the information, never to disclose the source from whence it came. Never allude to the hateful subject again, Harriet! It breaks my heart. I have been guilty towards you; I was guilty in mistrusting you, and Heaven is my witness, I wish not to escape from the consciousness of my fault, by throwing the blame of it upon another; but yet, he added, in a tone more approaching to bitterness than he had ever used before, "but yet I cannot easily forgive the individual whose integrity I valued so very highly as to permit my faith in him to shake my faith in you."

"You shall never hear me allude to the subject again, papa!" said she, "but this final word you must listen to. Neither you, nor the person who witnessed the exhibition which I made of myself at that dreadful ball, deserve any blame for having been shocked, either by hearing of or seeing it. But I never will speak to you upon the subject more."

Nor was there any temptation for her to do so, as far as her-

curiosity was concerned ; for she had no longer any doubt as to the fact that Charles Marshdale was the person from whom her father had received the intelligence which had led to so much suffering.

But Harriet, unlike her father, attributed not a shadow of blame to her old friend for what he had done ; she had no difficulty in understanding his motive ; she had no difficulty in approving the effort he had made to reclaim her ; and assuredly, she had no difficulty in confessing to herself that there was no excuse wanting for him, because he had condemned both her appearance and her conduct on that unfortunate night.

This one moment of painful intercourse between the father and daughter was mentioned to no one else, and soon seemed to be forgotten by themselves, for there rarely could be found a group in more perfect harmony with each other than that which was assembled round the Vicarage tea-table on the evening of the day that had brought so much agitation to the Manor House. But it was not fated that the enjoyment of this harmony should endure till the hour of rest ; for, just as the tea-things were removed, and when old Mr. Marshdale was describing the exact situation, form, and dimensions of the new farm-house at Five Elms, Jenny entered the parlour in a manner that denoted something out of the common way, and addressing herself to her master, informed him that a footman from the Manor House had been sent by Mrs. Montagu, desiring that he would please to go up to Mrs. Osterly directly, for that she was quite in her senses, and wished to see him, but that the doctor said she was dying.

Such a summons admitted of no delay ; and Mr. Hartwell left his family instantly, only pausing one moment to say that if he were detained beyond ten o'clock, he thought it would be better for them all to go to bed without waiting for him.

They were all too anxious, however, to obey this injunction very punctually ; but when the clock had struck eleven, Godfrey wisely declared that they must sit up no longer, and obedience on the part of the three anxious females was rendered easy by the arrival of another messenger from the Manor House, announcing that the old lady was still alive, but that Mr. Hartwell would not return home that night.

It will be easily believed that the Vicarage family did not lie late in bed on the following morning, yet notwithstanding the general anxiety, the habit of never venturing upon any intercourse with the household of Mrs. Osterly was so strong, that every one agreed it was better to wait for tidings, than to send for them.

They had not very long to wait, though their impatience, perhaps, made it appear otherwise. At about ten o'clock Mr.

Hartwell entered the parlour where they were all assembled, and the first glance at his countenance announced the gloomy nature of the scene he had quitted.

"It is all over then, Henry?" said his wife. "And dear Mrs. Montagu?" cried Mary. "Could she not come to us?"

"Yes, wife; it is all over!" said Mr. Hartwell, seating himself beside Harriet.

"Did she know you, Henry?" demanded Mrs. Hartwell.

"Yes, my dear—yes; she knew me, and she received the sacrament," he replied.

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Mrs. Hartwell.

"Oh, yes!" added Mary; "and it will be a comfort to dear Mrs. Montagu."

But, instead of answering to either of these observations, Mr. Hartwell, who looked as melancholy as if he had lost his sweet-tempered wife, instead of his sour-tempered neighbour, took Harriet by the hand, looked wistfully in her face, and burst into tears.

There was something—something so very mysterious and unaccountable in this, that they all three looked at him with astonishment, and his wife almost with terror.

"What is the matter with you, my dearest Henry?" she said. "You are ill—you are overcome. Pray, pray, my dear soul, compose yourself. Why should you suffer the old lady's death to affect you so strongly?"

"It does not affect me strongly, wife. It is not that—but it is the dreadful consciousness that, with all my love for her, I seem doomed to be this dear child's destruction."

And again taking the hand of Harriet, he drew her towards him, and pressed her to his heart, while he tearfully kissed her hair, as her head rested on his bosom.

"What can you mean, Mr. Hartwell, by saying that now?" said his wife, beyond measure puzzled both by his words and manner.

But, without paying any attention to her remonstrance, he continued to address himself wholly to Harriet, as he said, "You are too sincere, too perfectly true, my darling child, even to fancy that you ought to feel sorrow when I tell you that your husband, Lord Corwyn, is no more."

Harriet did not attempt to speak, but, raising herself from his arms, took one of his hands in each of hers, and looking him steadily in the face, seemed to look there for the confirmation of his startling words.

"Her husband dead!" ejaculated Mrs. Hartwell, without suffering her lips to repeat, "Thank Heaven," whatever her heart might do.

"My dear, dear Harriet!" cried Mary, in a voice of the most

unaffected satisfaction, "speak to papa! he looks as if he thought that, for some reason or other, you must be grieved at this extraordinary news."

"No, father!" said Harriet, solemnly. "I am not grieved. Why should you be?"

"Why?"—oh! my own darling, innocent child! My hot temper, and my own act and deed, have made a beggar of thee! Harriet!—that man told me that he had the power to divorce you, and demanded that your useless settlement, as he called it, should be returned. And I returned it. You have no jointure!"

At this moment Mrs. Hartwell rose, and left the room. She called her tallest maid, which was Jenny the cook, as she passed the kitchen-door, and proceeded with her up-stairs. Having reached her own room, she caused the long-legged damsel to draw a table to the chest of drawers, to place a chair upon the table, and herself upon the chair, and then, hoisting up to her a pair of tongs, desired that she would, forthwith, by the aid of that instrument, seize upon, and deliver to her, a certain brown paper parcel, which she assured her she would see if she would but raise herself a little bit higher still, by standing for half a moment upon her toes.

Jenny obeyed, and Mrs. Hartwell and her brown paper parcel were within the parlour door before her melancholy husband was aware that she had left the room.

"Promise me, Henry, that you will forgive my disobedience, and I will give you this," she said.

In less than a moment the eye of Mr. Hartwell was raised, from the parcel, to his wife's face, and that look certainly made her one of the very happiest women in the world.

It was as well, perhaps, for the perfection of her enjoyment, that she had not overheard what Harriet had been saying during her absence, which amounted to the most positive declaration which words could express, that she did not care the value of a straw for all the settlements in the world. But either from civility to her mother, or some other cause or causes, she never repeated such ungracious words again.

Mr. Hartwell, when sufficiently restored to composure to relate what had passed at the Manor House, did so in as few words as possible, and then seemed exceedingly glad to talk of something else.

The bed of Mrs. Osterly, after Mr. Hartwell had, at her own request, administered the holy sacrament to her and to Mrs. Montagu, was surrounded by Lord Corwyn, the lawyer, the apothecary, Miss Shrifflly, Mrs. Montagu, and Mr. Hartwell; and then the dying woman, having previously possessed herself of her will, signified to Mrs. Montagu that she was to come

close to her. She did so ; and Mrs. Osterly, having first pressed her lips upon her forehead, drew, with her left hand, the only limb that was not quite useless, this important document from under the bed-clothes, and placed it in her hands.

This was her last act and deed, and in less than five minutes she was a corpse.

Lord Corwyn was the first whose step disturbed the stillness that followed.

He at that moment, probably, remembered the acute observations on his deceased cousin's peculiarities pronounced by Miss Shrifflly, and her statement that "poor dear Mrs. Osterly liked nothing so well as making people think she meant this thing, when, in reality, she meant another," and therefore was that he insisted, in rather a peremptory manner, that this instrument thus placed in the hands of Mrs. Montagu should be immediately examined.

To object to this was impossible, however indecent such extreme haste might appear ; and Mrs. Montagu, conquering, though not without an effort, the repugnance she felt, moved to the bottom of the bed, where Mr. Hartwell stood, and placed the document in his hands. Up to this moment, no sign whatever of recognition had passed between Mr. Hartwell and his noble son-in-law. Neither did there follow any now, save that the irritated peer directed one hasty, scowling glance to the placid priest.

Having received the will into his hands, Mr. Hartwell, without deeming it necessary to stand upon any order in going, walked out of the room, and was followed by all present except one female servant and Mrs. Montagu ; whatever anxiety the latter might have felt being effectually subdued for the moment by the awfulness of the scene in which she had been so recently engaged.

The will proved to be one of rather unusually short dimensions, arising probably from the fact that one only legatee was named in it. All and everything in the shape of worldly goods, real or personal, of which Mrs. Osterly died possessed, were bequeathed to Mrs. Montagu.

It is probable that Mr. Hartwell, from his long knowledge of the defunct lady's very peculiar character, had felt, even to the last moment, doubtful as to what her will might be. On entering the parlour, he delivered the still unopened parchment which had been entrusted to him into the hands of the lawyer, requesting that he would read it aloud. This was done very distinctly, every eye present being earnestly fixed upon the reader ; but when the name of Mrs. Montagu, pronounced with all the emphasis usual on such occasions, followed the

comprehensive form of donation above mentioned, Mr. Hartwell almost involuntarily looked at Lord Corwyn, and was immediately aware of a very alarming change in his countenance. He returned Mr. Hartwell's glance with an expression that shall not be dwelt upon, then became darkly red, then lividly pale, and then fell prone upon his face on the floor. The lancet of Mr. Bates was applied in vain—the Lord Viscount Corwyn was no more.

* * * * *

All the ceremonies which followed were performed with the utmost propriety. There was business to be done afterwards, but none which produced any difficulty, or even delay, beyond what must always be inevitable when large possessions are passed from the dead to the living. By a peculiarity in the wording of Lady Corwyn's pompous settlement, the house in Tavendish Square, and all its valuable appurtenances, were declared to be the absolute property of Lord Corwyn's widow. This, at her earnest request, was immediately sold, and left Harriet in the possession of above ten thousand pounds besides her annual income; for some of the pictures were really good, and sold well. Of the personal property Mr. Hartwell reserved a considerable portion of the handsome collection of books, and as much of the ostentatious display of plate as could be conveniently stowed away at the Vicarage. For still it was at the Vicarage that the young, beautiful, and wealthy widow implored she might be permitted to reside; and, after a little of what was thought proper remonstrance on the part of her parents, this was complied with, her life interest in Cuthbert House being advantageously disposed of to the heir-at-law; and all domestic arrangements were rendered easy by Mrs. Montagu's succeeding in persuading her dearly-beloved Godfrey Marshdale and his wife to take up their abode with her till the new house was finished.

And at this point I might leave them all, if the placing my sister heroines in a state very nearly bordering on perfect happiness would content me; but Harriet, exquisitely as she enjoyed the soft and soothing tranquillity which had succeeded to all the miseries of her married life, was not destined to escape some further adventures, with which the patient reader must submit to be made acquainted, unless he insists upon my story being doomed to remain for ever in the unhappy state of that of "The Bear and the Fiddle."

All that remains to be told shall, however, be related with as much brevity as possible.

led to the placing the umqwhile splendid Harriet in a position which is much less brilliant than some to which she might have aspired.

When all the good folks who felt interested in the affair were sufficiently recovered from their astonishment, to permit their thinking how matters might be best arranged, so as to keep this oddly-matched couple in their neighbourhood, Mrs. Montagu made a proposal, which was very willingly acceded to by all the parties concerned—namely, that her adopted children, Godfrey and Mary (upon whom she had already settled her estate), should take up their residence with her in the Manor House, and that Charles and his beautiful wife should occupy that part of the new Farm-house which had been prepared for their brother and sister.

This arrangement was found to answer perfectly in every respect. The old Farmer died about twenty years ago, leaving that part of his property on which the house stood to his youngest son. Susan has a snug little rent-charge on the other portion of the estate, and lives with Charles and his wife; and, as if to throw off as much as possible all approximation to the only condition in which Lady Corwyn had found life painful, Charles became curate, first to his father-in-law, and then to his successor, a piece of preferment which he flatters himself he is likely to keep for many years, as it enables both himself and wife to be useful, and in a way, too, as Harriet says, that is the most likely to bring her back, as nearly as possible, to the condition she forfeited when she left the innocent Eden where she was born, to enter upon a world whose perils she had not been taught to understand.

Good Mrs. Montagu did not abuse the unlimited power bestowed upon her by her capricious cousin, for she settled fifty pounds per annum, for life, upon poor Miss Shriuffy, declaring that she conceived not any situation to be more pitiable than such as led to the falsifying every thought of the heart in the hope of obtaining daily bread thereby.

On Mrs. Daws, being rather aged, she bestowed an equal annuity, and to all the other servants she paid a year's wages, but steadily declined retaining any of them, being of opinion that the living in constant subserviency of will to an ill-judging superior, is being tutored in a bad school of morality.

Mrs. Morris continues with Lady Corwyn, half housekeeper and half friend. Mrs. Selby is married. None of Mrs. Margaret Johnson's nieces have, as yet, found husbands, and almost the last words which their aunt uttered were—"You have all reason to bless me for the care I have taken of you!"

The "ménage" of the curate of Penmorris and his wife is rather a singular one, being a mixture of simplicity and

elegance, homeliness and refinement, thriftiness and liberality, which few have the power of bringing together, and still fewer the courage.

Their large income being for the most part dependent on the life of Harriet, they yearly set about one-third of it apart as a future provision for their son and their three daughters ; but as the remainder amounts to a much larger sum than curates who live in farm-houses (even though they have plate-glass windows in them) can usually command, and as they spend not one single shilling for the sake of ostentation, they find themselves, notwithstanding their extensive charities, very rich little people.

Godfrey and Mary have but two children, a son and a daughter ; the latter has been for many years married to a man whose only fault was having a larger property than was quite suitable to the simple manner of life to which she had been accustomed. As yet, however, neither her deer-park nor her four horses appear to have done her any harm. But as her father does not think that he need trouble himself about any future provision for her, he has made over the estate of Five Elms to his nephew, who farms it in excellent style, and who, being the youngest of the family, save one, and still a bachelor, resides with his parents, declaring, indeed, that he never will reside anywhere else, and that he never will take a wife at all, unless he can find one who may join the party entirely to her own satisfaction and theirs also.

Two of his sisters have long been married to clergymen, but the third, who is considerably younger, occasionally gives her mother a good deal of anxiety, for she is very nearly as beautiful as herself, and is so alarmingly admired, that many fears are entertained lest she should be sought and won by some one who will run away with her from them all. But, notwithstanding the possibility of such a misfortune, it would be a difficult thing to find a happier set of people than the Marshdales and their descendants.

THE END.

